

JOURNALS, DIARIES, AND LETTERS WRITTEN
BY WOMEN ON THE OREGON TRAIL 1836-1865

by

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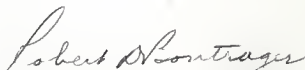
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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

"We are so near encountering the difficulties of an unheard of journey for females." --Narcissa Whitman

"About noon we hailed the Columbia for the first time."-- Esther Hanna

"Ho for California."--Helen Carpenter

"As I sit here in the shade of our prairie schooner with this blank book ready to record the event of this our first day on the road, the thought comes to me; Why are we here? Why have we left home, friends, relatives, associates, and loved ones.?"--Sarah Herndon

There never was any debate of whether men could make the 2,000 mile overland trip from the Missouri River to the West Coast. They just did it-- first using a combination of river travel and overland trails and then travelling all the way on the overland trail that would become a highway to Oregon and California.

For women, making the trip was a different matter. At first in the early 19th century no one seemed to care whether or not American women could safely travel across the western frontier. It was accepted that Indian women could do it, and many had heard about the Indian woman Sacajewea on the Lewis and Clark expedition. But Indian women and white women were hardly alike in the minds of 19th century Americans.

Before 1830 wagons had never been taken across the Rocky Mountains, and some believed women needed to ride in wagons to travel to the West Coast. Then in 1830 the fur trading expedition led by William Sublette took the first wagons loaded with trade goods to the fur-traders rendezvous in the Wind River Mountains (Wyoming). On April 10 William Sublette's company of 81 mounted men and "a caravan of ten wagons drawn by five mules each, and two dearborns drawn by one mule each" left St. Louis, crossed the Plains and the Rocky Mountains and reached the rendezvous. On October 11th the same caravan returned to St. Louis loaded with furs and completed the first successful round trip with wagons into the Rocky Mountains.

In a letter to the United States Secretary of War, William Sublette, Jedediah Smith and David Jackson wrote, "This is the first time the wagons ever went to the Rocky Mountains; and the ease and safety with which it was done prove the facility of communicating over land with the Pacific Ocean." This letter was read to Congress and entered in the Congressional Record as Document 39 by the 21st United States Congress. Newspapers mentioned this historic overland trip to the Rocky Mountains by wagons, but it took almost six more years before the real importance of this event was noticed.

"Wherever a wagon can go, a woman can go" was an idea suggested by Marcus Whitman in the journal which he kept on his exploring tour of the West in 1835. He reasoned that women could ride in the wagons whenever they became tired of riding horseback.

There were skeptics who did not believe that a white woman could ever make the trip. W. J. Snelling wrote an article in the New England Magazine in February 1832 in which he said, "Only parties of men could undergo the vicissitudes of the journey, none who ever made the trip would assert that a woman could have accompanied them." George Catlin, who had been on the plains, agreed and told the missionaries who were considering sending women to Oregon that he would not take a "white female into that country for the whole continent of America."

Two women ended the debate and settled the argument in 1836 when they rode horseback, side-saddle in the polite custom of the day, most of the 1900 miles from the Missouri frontier to Fort Walla Walla (Washington). This missionary party took a wagon with them most of the way for the convenience of the women. Narcissa Whitman described her trip as "an unheard-of journey for females." Narcissa and Eliza Spalding were travelling with their husbands in the fur company's caravan to the rendezvous in the present state of

Wyoming and then were conducted from the rendezvous to the future mission site near Walla Walla, Washington by a delegation of mission personnel and indians.

Both Narcissa and Eliza wrote letters to their families in the East describing their trip, and both kept journals of their experiences on the trail. The arrival of these two women on the west coast frontier was convincing proof that women could cross the frontier to the west coast. Two years later four more missionary women made the same trip and joined the first party at the Whitman mission. All four wrote letters home describing parts of their trip, and three of the women kept daily journals on the trail.

Men no longer debated whether women could make the trip; instead the topic of discussion was whether women should make the trip. On the pages of the New York Daily Tribune Horace Greeley argued in 1843, "It is palpable homicide to tempt to send women and children over this thousand miles of precipice and volcanic sterility to Oregon." Other journalists continued the debate. The St. Joseph Gazette suggested that families should remain at home and not risk their lives on the Plains. Working men "accustomed to hard work and hard fare would do well but for all others at this time, we think it folly in the extreme."

On the other side pro-emigration journalists pointed to these six missionary women living in Washington as proof of the safety of the trip for women. The editor of the Oregonian and Indian Advocate wrote in the January 1839 issue,

Six white women (the ladies of the missionaries of ABCFM) have already crossed the prairies to Oregon; not with a company of emigrants, who travelled leisurely, and regarded comfort equally with time; but with a caravan of traders, who travel as fast as the strength of their horses will permit, and know no day of rest; and who are wicked and licentious a set of fellows as ever caroused over the midnight bowl. With such companions did these ladies and their husbands made the

passage of the Mountains, and we are assured by their own testimony that they were in better health and spirits at the end than at the beginning of their journey, having found it extremely pleasant, notwithstanding the circumstances named. This shows, we think, the feasibility of this route for ladies, and even children.

The importance of this trip made by these missionary women and the records of the trip which they sent back home to friends and family should not be overlooked. Without Narcissa and Eliza and the other four women, the great Oregon and California emigrations may not have occurred or at least may have been delayed. Men had travelled west, but without the women and children there would not have been large numbers of permanent settlements started and new farms staked out. Narcissa and Eliza opened the door to emigration by families; they accomplished this by making the journey and then telling others about their experience.

Men could have continued to debate the question of women journeying to the west coast for one, two, or three more decades. It was these women who answered the question by doing it. These women and the men with them opened the western frontier and started the emigration. Who can say what would have occurred if the United States had not added California and Oregon to the Union at the time that it was done.

Without these emigrant families the history of the West could have been quite different. In Oregon the emigrant families organized a provisional government in 1843 and adopted a set of laws. In 1848 Oregon was officially made a territory of the United States. In 1848 Mexico surrendered its claim to California by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, after being pressured by U. S. military operations and the numbers of U. S. emigrants in California.

How much influence did the women have? The fact that women could and did travel safely to Oregon proved beyond debate that women could successfully go west on the Oregon/California Trail. Their articles, letters, diaries, and journals written on the trail which were sent home to friends and relatives

and printed in newspapers certainly did much to dispel fear of deserts, Indians, wild animals, and other dangers along the trail. These writings were credible descriptions of overland travel and also testimonies of how the women endured and enjoyed the trip. The suggestions that these women made to their readers helped later emigrants plan and prepare better for successful overland travel. The effect of these women's letters and journals on history cannot be measured, but there is no doubt that these first-hand written reports were eagerly received and widely read by friends and family, and by neighbors and acquaintances all over the United States. The fact that the writings of the women entered many communication channels had the effect of turning the writings into mass communications.

Every spring and summer from 1836 there were women heading west on the overland trail. There were four missionary wives on the trail in 1838. Mary Gray, Myra Eells, Sarah Smith, and Mary Walker travelled with a light one-horse wagon, but the women rode horseback much of the way.

One year later there were two Oregon-bound missionary couples on the trail. John and Desire Griffin and Asahel and Eliza Munger reached the rendezvous on the Green River (Wyoming) on July 5th and finally their destination in Oregon several weeks after that. Neither of these women left journals or letters to record their experiences on the trail.

In 1840 there were women on the trail again. Three women accompanied their missionary husbands to Oregon and again this missionary party travelled in the American Fur Company's caravan which was on its way to the fur traders rendezvous. In addition to the missionary families in this caravan were Joel and Mary Walker and their four children, John, Joseph, Newton, and Isabella, and also Mary's sister Martha Young. The Walker family took two wagons loaded with their family possessions and provisions. The Walkers have been called "the first family of avowed emigrants."

In the next year the first emigrant wagon train set out on the well-established road to Oregon. There were 79 emigrants, including five women and about ten children. This was called the Bidwell-Bartleston party. Most of the families went to Oregon, but Benjamin and Nancy Kelsey and their child, accompanied by several men, went to California.

In 1842 the emigrant caravan was 125 strong and included 16 or 17 families, and all of them went to Oregon. The next year, 1843, was the first big emigration, estimated to number around 800 persons with 110 wagons. Most of these emigrants were families moving to Oregon.

There were several jumping-off points for the emigrants in 1844. Three-hundred and twenty-three departed from a point nine miles above St. Joseph, 350 left Independence bound for Oregon, and about 40 men with an unrecorded number of women and children left from Council Bluffs bound for both California and Oregon.

By 1845 the emigrants numbered in the thousands. More than 954 people departed from St. Joseph. At Independence the editor of the Western Expositor wrote on May 3rd, "We're in a perfect Oregon fever." Someone estimated 1,000 to 2,000 people were congregating to depart for the West.

In 1846 the emigration was again recorded in the thousands, and it was even larger in the following year. Nearly all were bound for Oregon. One estimate placed the figures for 1847 at a total of 3,509 including 1,336 men 789 women, and 1,384 children under 16 years old.

By the end of 1846 the trail was very well marked by the hooves of cattle and the wheels of wagons. Several guide books were available to the emigrants to advise them about outfitting, supplies, routes, landmarks, water, grass and wood supplies along the trail. In their journals and

diaries the women mention their guide books and even occasionally quote from them.

1849 marked a change in the travellers and in the trip. Prior to this year the emigration had included many families and women travelling in large wagon trains consisting of hundreds of people and cattle. The emigrants were taking livestock, tools, seed, and other things they would use to farm the land, raise cattle, and build homes. They banded together for mutual protection and often hired mountain men as guides. The travel was paced to the livestock, and every effort was made to protect the health and strength of the cattle. There was no real hurry. Emigrants would travel from the time in the spring when the prairie grass had grown tall enough to feed and sustain the livestock to the first big snows and freezes of winter in the mountains.

The year 1849 spelled change on the trail. In this year the travellers were mostly men, and everyone was in a rush to reach the destination because treasure was waiting to be discovered by the first and the lucky. This was the year of the Gold Rush. Fewer women travelled, and only one woman's journal that was written on the trail in this year survives.

In the following year gold-rushers again flooded the trail. One woman's journal written on the trail in 1850 describes the year's rush to California and recreates some of the excitement of the travel.

The body of literature about the trail and the travel was growing every year. By 1851 the women's journals began to quote from letters and diaries of friends and relations who had travelled the trail in previous years. Some of the women wrote in their journals that they were keeping a journal for the benefit of friends and/or relations who were planning to go west in the future. Women were reading and writing about the trail.

The 15 years from 1850 to 1865 was another period in the history of the emigration and travel on the overland trail. In this time the

the travellers were a mixture of miners and emigrant families. The large emigrant trains of the 40s. changed in the 50s to smaller groups bound together by common destinations and common goals. There were rushing gold seekers and emigrants with plodding drives of cattle all trying to travel the same trail, use the same watering places, and consume the same patches of prairie grasses.

Every year the federal government was sending soldiers and building forts along the trail to protect the emigrants from Indians. Some frontier entrepreneurs had built toll bridges and constructed ferries across the larger rivers and started trading posts to supply travellers with the necessities along the road and also to make a tidy profit for themselves.

From 1850 to 1865 there are over 40 women's letters, journals and diaries. These writings chronicle this great period of westward movement. In their writings these women describe what they saw and experienced along the trail--the other emigrants, the Indians, fur traders, soldiers, the flora and fauna, the weather and the countryside and landmarks. They narrate their adventures on the trail. They discuss their preparations for this journey; they record their health problems, accidents, deaths, and births. They tell about their clothing, discuss style among the travellers and Indians; and they often complain about washing and ironing enroute. The women describe food and drinks and cooking, express their opinions about buffalo and antelope meat and about cow chips as fuel, and comment on picking berries, hunting, and fishing. Most of them describe their beds and sleeping arrangements, their wagons and tents, their livestock and pets. They relate their joys and fun as they are entertained. The journals and diaries contain descriptions of a variety of Fourth of July celebrations. The women express opinions about their religion, worship, observation of the Sabbath, and in a few journals the women record their prayers. At some point in her writing, each woman makes some statement about the trip.

Sixty-two women recorded the story of their experiences on the overland trail during the 30 years of major trail activity. These women writers communicate across the century and provide fresh insights and additional information about the trail experience, the emigrations, and the women.

This collection of 62 writings is not a scientific random sample, rather these are the ones that were destined to survive. These 62 journals, diaries, and letters which were written as women travelled west on the trail to Oregon and California are the history, the true story of the women on the trail. These 62 writings are credible first-hand reports which should be read, studied, and accepted.

Speculation about these women and the whole women's experience on the Oregon/California trail is appropriate only when it is based on the facts contained in these 62 writings. Speculation and study based on the reminiscences written by women, after they have been separated from their experience by a distance of decades, are not considered to be credible since reminiscences are altered by the process of remembering.

In this writer's opinion this body of literature written by these women writers on the trail is an adequate record and a reliable history. These women tell their story accurately, they express their feelings poignantly, and they describe their experiences realistically.

The purpose of this paper is to survey the journals, diaries, and letters written by women on the Oregon/ California Trail between 1836 and 1865.

In Chapter One the original women's manuscripts are examined and described. The writing equipment and the physical conditions surrounding the writers are reviewed, and the women's reasons for writing are considered.

Chapter Two looks at the trail through the women's eyes. From the journals, diaries, and letters a composite picture is drawn of the children, the emigrants, the landmarks, the fur traders, the Indians, and the Mormons on the trail.

The women's personal experience on the trail is the subject of Chapter Three. Trip preparations, food, health, wagon train environment, dress, recreation or leisure, religion, and motives are described, and a consensus of the women's trail experience is drawn from the writings of these 62 women.

METHODOLOGY

One goal of this research project was to locate all of the journals, diaries, and letters written by women enroute on the Oregon/California Trail between 1836 and 1865. Other bibliographies include reminiscences in lists of journals, diaries, and letters written about the overland trail, so it was a major task to identify and separate the journals, diaries, and letters from the reminiscences. Out of a total of 161 writings by women which were located and studied, only 62 proved to be actually written while the women were travelling on the overland trail to California or Oregon.

Only journals, diaries, and letters written from 1836 to 1865 are considered in this study. These boundary dates of 1836 and 1865 represent the year women first crossed the Rockies as part of a wagon train and the changes in transportation which resulted from the construction of the transcontinental railroad which was begun in 1865 at the end of the Civil War.

In order to allow these women to speak for themselves, their words are reproduced as accurately as possible in the quotations contained in this study. If the original manuscript was available for study, this was the source of the quoted material. Spelling, punctuation and lack of punctuation, and even blank spaces were copied as they appeared in the original writing.

CHAPTER I. THE DIARIES, JOURNALS, AND LETTERS

"It is lightning all around and the face of the moon is obscured under dark clouds and the wind is blowing and I am in the wagon trying to write, a little lantern is tied to the ridge pole."--Helen Stewart

"As I was writing on the ground, by the side of the wagon, a great number (of Indians) came around me and stood looking at my writing for a long time." Marie Norton

"I write on my lap with the wind rocking the wagon."--Algeline Ashley

"I rote thiz letter on the bottom of the dish pan."--Mary Dutro

"Sometimes I would not get the chance to write for two or three days, and then I would have to rise in the night when my babe and all hands were asleep, light a candle and write."--Elizabeth Geer

"I find it impossible to keep a regular journal...I will try and get an almanac there (Fort Laramie), as I have entirely lost the day of the month as well as the day of the week."--Mary Powers

TABLE 1

LIST OF WRITERS OF THE JOURNALS, DIARIES, AND LETTERS

YEAR	WOMAN	AGE	DESTINATION	DEPARTS	HOME	JOL*	LOC**
1836	Eliza Spalding.....	29...	Oregon.....	Independence..	Cono....	0....	KSU
1836	Narcissa Whitman.....		Oregon.....	Independence..	Pa.....	J&L..	KSU
1838	Myra Eells.....	33...	Oregon.....	Westport.....	Mass....	0....	KSU
1838	Sarah Smith.....		Oregon.....	Westport.....		0....	KSU
1838	Mary Walker.....	27...	Oregon.....	Westport.....	Maine...0....		KSU
1846	Tamsen Donner.....	30+	California...	Independence..	Ill....	L....	MPL
1846	Virginia Reed.....	14...	California...	Independence..	Ill....	L....	MPL
1847	Rachel Fisher.....	25...	Oregon.....		Iowa....	L....	WPL
1847	Patty Sessions.....	52...	Salt Lake City.	Omaha.....	Nauvoo..	L....	WPL
1847	Elizabeth Geer.....	38...	Oregon.....	St. Joseph....	Indiana..0....		OSL
1848	Keturah Belknap.....	27...	Oregon.....	St. Joseph....	Ohio....	J....	WPL
1849	Sallie Hester.....	14...	California...	St. Joseph....	Indiana..0....		MPL
1850	Margaret Frink.....	30+	California...	Council Bluffs.	Ohio....	J....	CPS
1851	Harriet Clark.....	?	Oregon.....		Ohio....	J....	OHS
1851	Susan Cranstone.....	?	Oregon.....	Council Bluffs.	?.....	0....	OHS
1851	Mrs. E. A. Hadley.....	?	Oregon.....	Council Bluffs.	Ill....	J....	OHS
1851	Elizabeth Wood.....	18+	Oregon.....	?	Ill....	J....	KSHS
1852	Cecelia Adams.....	23...	Oregon.....	Council Bluffs.	Ill....	J....	KSU
1852	Algeline Ashley.....	22...	California...?		Wis....	J....	HL
1852	Mary Bailey.....	22...	California...	St. Joseph....	Ohio....	J....	KSU
1852	Lucy Cooke.....	20+	California...	Kansville....	Iowa....	L....	UNI
1852	Mary Outro.....	14...	California...	Independence..	Ohio....	L....	JCHS
1852	Lodisa Frizzell.....	28+	California...	St. Joseph....	Ill....	J....	NSHS
1852	Esther Hanna.....	20+	Oregon.....	St. Joseph....	Penn....	J....	OHS
1852	Eliza McAuley.(Egbert).....	17...	California...	Kansville....	Iowa....	J....	BL
1852	Caroline Richardson.....	?	California...	Weston.....	Mich....	J....	BL
1852	Lydia Rudd.....	27+	Oregon.....	St. Joseph....	?.....	0....	KSU

TABLE 1--continued

YEAR	WOMAN	AGE	DESTINATION	DEPARTS	HOME	JOL	LOC
1852	Mrs. Francis Sawyer.....	adult.	California...	St. Joseph...	Kentucky...	J...	BL
1852	Cornelia Sharp.....	adult.	Oregon.....	Independence..	Mo.....	O...	NSHS
1853	Maria Belshaw.....	adult.	Oregon.....	Council Bluffs.	Indiana...	J...	OHS
1853	Elizabeth Goltra.....	22...	Oregon.....	Independence..	?.....	O...	OHS
1853	Celinda Hines.....	adult.	Oregon.....	Independence..	NY.....	J...	NSHS
1853	Rebecca Ketcham.....	18...	Oregon.....	Independence..	NY.....	J...	OHS
1853	Amelia Knight.....	adult.	Oregon.....	?.....	Iowa....	J...	KSU
1853	Esther Lyman.....	27...	Oregon.....	?.....	Mich....	J...	LCCHS
1853	Charlotte Pengra.....	26...	Oregon.....	Kanesville....	Ill.....	J...	LCCHS
1853	Agnes Stewart.....	21...	Oregon.....	St. Joseph....	Penn....	O...	LCCHS
1853	Helen Stewart.....	18...	Oregon.....	St. Joseph....	Penn....	J...	LCCHS
1853	Harriet Ward.....	50...	California...	Kanesville....	Vermont..	J...	UN
1853	Catherine Washburn....	18...	Oregon.....	Council Bluffs.	Iowa....	O...	LCCHS
1853	Velina Williams.....	20+...	Oregon.....	Kanesville....	Ill.....	O...	NSHS
1854	Mary Burrel.....	19...	California...	Council Bluffs?	?.....	J...	YUL
1854	Sarah Sutton.....	?.....	Oregon.....	St. Joseph....	Ill.....	J...	OHS
1856	Mary Rockwood Powers...	20+...	California...	Council Bluffs.	Wis.....	J...	KSHS
1857	Helen Carpenter.....	19...	California...	Independence..	Kansas..	J...	KSU
1859	Harriet Griswold.....	20+...	California...	Council Bluffs.	Ohio....	O...	CHS
1859	Marie Norton.....	adult.	California...	Council Bluffs.	Iowa....	O...	BL
1860	Helen Clark.....	adult.	Denver.....	Plattsmouth...	Ill.....	J...	KSU
1860	Mary Fish.....	adult.	California...	Council Bluffs.	Iowa....	J...	BL
1860	Mary Jane Guill.....	20+...	California...	Council Bluffs.	Mo.....	J...	KSU
1860	Mollie Sanford.....	25+...	Denver.....	Nebraska City..	Neb.....	J...	NSHS
1861	Malvina Manning.....	20....	California...	Council Grove..	?.....	O...	BL
1862	Louisa Rahm.....	adult.	Oregon.....	Council Bluffs.	Ohio....	J...	BL
1862	Jane Tourtillot.....	29....	California...	Platte.....	Ohio....	J...	KSU
1863	Ellen Adams.....	adult.	California...	Council Bluffs?	?.....	O...	BL
1863	Catharine Collins.....	40+...	Ft. Laramie..	Platte.....	?.....	...	KSJ
1863	Abby Fulkerth.....	adult.	California...	?.....	Iowa....	J...	BL
1864	Kate Ounlap.....	27....	Montana.....	Council Bluffs.	Iowa....	J...	KSU
1864	Elizabeth Porter.....	33....	Oregon.....	Plattenworth...	Iowa....	J...	OHS
1864	Mary E. Warner.....	20....	California...	Council Bluffs.	Ill.....	J...	BL
1864	Mary Eliza Warner.....	15....	California...	Council Bluffs.	Ill.....	O...	BL
1865	Sarah Herndon.....	20+...	Montana.....	Plattsmouth...	Tenn....	J...	KSU

TABLE 1--continued

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TABLE 1

BL.....	Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California
CHS.....	California Historical Society, San Francisco, California
CPS.....	University Library, California Polytechnic State, San Luis Obispo, California
HL.....	The Huntington Library, San Marino, California
JCHS.....	Jackson County Historical Society, Independence, Missouri
KSHS.....	Library, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas
KSU.....	Farrell Library, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas
LCHS.....	Lane County Pioneer-Historical Society, Eugene, Oregon
MPL.....	Manhattan Public Library, Manhattan, Kansas
NSHS.....	Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska
OHS.....	Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon
UN.....	Library, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska
WPL.....	Wamego Public Library, Wamego, Kansas
YUL.....	Yale University Library, New Haven, Connecticut

THE MANUSCRIPTS

The surviving 63 journals, diaries, and letters written by women on the Oregon/California Trail are as diverse and varied as the individuals who wrote them. A few of the diaries are elegant little leather-bound books that would fit in a lady's pocket; others are large cardboard-bound copybooks or ledgerbooks. Some of the writers composed masterpieces of colorful description, exciting narration, and beautiful language, while others made a brief record of their journey noting only miles travelled, rivers crossed, and weather experienced. Certain ones wrote as if they were talking to themselves in a personal and private way, but others wrote so the journal could be published for whole world to read.

A small number of the original diaries, journals, and letters are safely stored in libraries and collections and can be examined, but many of the original manuscripts have been lost. Many more are only available as copies in the form of typescripts made by family members or handwritten copies made from the original by the author. There are some of these journals, diaries, and letters that are preserved only in published form.

Certain general conclusions about all of the diaries, journals, and letters can be drawn by examining and studying the small number of original manuscripts that are preserved and available.

The original journals and diaries were written on everything from scraps of paper to beautiful leather-bound volumes. In size these vary from

a tiny three by four inch palm-sized diary to a larger 12 by eight and one-half inch pasteboard covered-copybook or ledger book. The size of the journal or diary imposed limitations on the length of the entry for each day.

Several of the women wrote in the elegant leather-bound pocket or palm-sized diaries. Carrying a small volume was the utilitarian thing to do when emigrants were trying to keep their loads light and small, but the tiny pages made writing tedious and limited the volume of writing.

Harriet Clark's diary is a three by four inch diary bound in black leather. Agnes Stewart's tiny volume had blank, unlined pages. She wrote in her book carefully in ink. Abby Fulkerth's book was palm-sized, but the pages in it were lined. Louisa Rahm's four by three inch volume had dates printed in the book which allowed her just one inch of space per daily entry. Louisa wrote small and her diary is very readable, but she was severely limited by the small space for each daily entry.¹

Several of the women selected pasteboard-covered copybooks or hard-bound copybooks. These were not usually as elegant looking, they took slightly more space in the wagon, and they could not be carried around in a pocket. However, they were easier to write in, and they provided more space for each daily entry.

Rebecca Ketcham wrote in pencil in her large pasteboard copybook. Harriet Ward started writing in ink in a ledger book which measured seven by eleven inches, but she switched to pencil after she spilled her ink during a storm on the Platte River Road. Harriet's journal pages are lined but the space was not limited for each daily entry. Her book reveals a lot about her and is very personal. Its pages are yellow and fragile with age, and some are marked with the imprint of trillium and other wildflowers she gathered along the trail and then pressed between the pages.²

Velina Williams wrote in pencil in her ledger book. Mary Fish chose a large twelve by nine and one half inch ledger book with lined page to take on her journey. Sarah Sutton and Caroline Richardson selected six by eight inch copybooks.³

Charlotte Pengra wrote on pale-blue seven and one-half by ten inch sheets of paper that were not bound together in any way. Other women used loose pages and mailed them home in sections at 'post offices' along the trail. Algeline Ashley sent her diary in sections and only one of the sections survives. Esther Lyman and Elizabeth Geer mailed their journals to friends at home. Narcissa Whitman sent her journal home at the request of her mother.⁴

Some of the women wrote with pencils; other used pen and ink. Rebecca Ketcham, Velina Williams, and Malvina Manning wrote their diaries in pencil. There were fewer problems transporting a pencil on the trail.

Several of the writers had problems with their bottles of ink. Two of the women spilled their ink and recorded the accident on or in their journals. Harriet Ward's journal entry for June 15th is blurred by a large blot of ink. In later years she explained that she spilled her ink. From June 15th the remainder of her diary is written in pencil.⁵

Lucy Cooke also had an accident with her ink and had to discontinue writing until she got some more, evidently at nearby Ft. Bridger. She wrote in her diary, "Since writing the above I upset my ink and lost my pen, consequently my writing has had to be abandoned for awhile, but we have journeyed on and on each day, till we reached Fort Bridger."⁶

Ink was available at some of the trading posts along the trail in 1852. Lucy Cooks's husband bought her ink at both Fort Bridger and Fort Laramie. She wrote, "William bought a small bottle of ink also. It was only a ten-cent bottle, but he paid thirty cents for it. (Fort Laramie)"⁷

Charlotte Pengra Pengra wrote all of her journal in ink. Harriet Ward and Harriet Griswold started their diaries in ink and then switched to pencil. Mary Warner wrote in pencil, and at the end of her journal she noted that she had run out of both paper and pencil. She wrote, "June 20 This old journal is about done for book filled, paper all gone, pencil worn out."⁸

Some women sent their trail journals, diaries, and letters to newspapers for publication in serial form. In some cases it is only in published form that these writings survive. Elizabeth Wood sent her narrative to the Peoria Weekly Republican in 1852,⁹ and Sarah Herndon wrote her journal in letter style to be published in the Rocky Mountain Husbandman in 1865.¹⁰

Several of the diaries, journals, and letters have been printed in state historical magazines during the past century, and in some cases this published version is the only surviving copy. The journals and diaries of six women on the trail are printed in issues of The Transactions of the Oregon Pioneer Association: Cecelia Adams, Elizabeth Geer, Celinda Hines, Amelia Stewart Knight, Cornelia Sharp, and Velina Williams. Issues of The Oregon Historical Society Quarterly contain the diaries and journals of Marie Belshaw, Rebecca Ketcham, Agnes Stewart, and Elizabeth Wood.

Undoubtedly there were a lot more than 63 women who wrote diaries, journals, and letters out of the thousands of women who travelled the trail. It is probably remarkable that even 63 or so survive today when the problems of their preservation for 120 or more years is considered. Some journals and diaries were undoubtedly lost out of wagons on the trail before they were ever completed. Some were lost by the casual mail service of the wilderness. Others were misplaced after arrival in Oregon or California, and still others were thrown away or forgotten as the families made numerous moves

from farm to farm or from home to home. A few were burned in fires or lost in other tragedies. Some may have been discarded by disinterested descendants. A few more women's trail journals, diaries, and letters are still in private ownership with no copies safely preserved in libraries.

The survival of letters written by women on the trail was even more precarious than the survival of the journals and diaries. The trail letters of only four women have been preserved where they are available in collections, but these four letters make historic statements. Narcissa Whitman, Tamsen Donner, Virginia Reed, and Mary Dutton wrote narratives which are important in all collections of trail literature and history.

WRITING CONDITIONS

Keeping track of a pen and ink, a pencil, and the journal or the paper was just one of the commitments that the writer on the trail had to make. Another problem the writer had to face was that of finding a suitable place to write. On the trail there were no writing desks or even tables for the convenience of a journal or letter writer. The women sat in their wagons, on tree stumps, and a few even sat on rocks or mountain tops as they wrote. They rested their journals or paper on everything from dishpans to wagon seats.

The women frequently described their physical positions and conditions around them. Helen Stewart wrote, "...it is lightning all around and the face of the moon is obscured under dark clouds and the wind is blowing and I am in the wagon trying to write, a little lantern is tied to the ridge pole..."¹¹

In 1860 Mollie Sanford complained, "I find camping not adapted to journalizing, but I will try to write a little almost every day."¹² Harriet

Ward did some of her writing in her wagon while her family rested. One day she wrote, "Here I am, sitting on the front seat of the wagon writing, Willis asleep beside me, Frank seated upon the bed playing her guitar and singing 'I've something Sweet to Tell You'." ¹³

At noon on another day Harriet wrote, "Father is taking his daily siesta in the wagon beside me. Willie lies upon his pillow on the front seat of the wagon reading Thackery's Henry Esmond." ¹⁴

In 1852 Algeline Ashley wrote, "I write on my lap with the wind rocking the wagon." ¹⁵

Mary Dutro found an unusual object to substitute for a desk. She wrote, "I rote thiz letter on the bottom of the dish pan." ¹⁶

Finding time to write was often a problem when the wagons were travelling long distances and long hours. One night Elizabeth Geer wrote, "I could have written a great deal more if I had had the opportunity. Sometimes I would not get the chance to write for two or three days, and then would have to rise in the night when my babe and all hands were asleep, light a candle and write..." ¹⁷

On evening Mrs. Hadley wrote while others made some music on the prairie. "We are a merry crowd, while I am journaizing one of the company is playing the violin which sounds delightful way out here. My accordian is also good as I carry it on the carriage and play as we travel." ¹⁸ Another day she took advantage of one of the trail landmarks and sat on top of Independence Rock (Wyoming) to make her journal entry. "...took a walk upon it (Independence Rock) pretty hard to ascend. I am now seated upon it journalizing. There are thousands of names." ¹⁹

Marie Norton had an uninvited audience on July 3, 1859, as she wrote in her journal. "As I was writing on the ground, by the side of the wagon,

a great number (of Indians) came around me and stood looking at my writing for a long time. I suppose it was a novelty to them."²⁰

At least one woman found it difficult to write in her journal. Even keeping track of the days of the week and the dates was an impossible chore for Mary Powers. On the Platte River (Nebraska) she wrote in her journal,

I find it impossible to keep a regular journal. We start very early, have dinner sometimes earlier, sometimes later, and as many of the streams are dry we are often obliged to drive late for a camping ground. Then with mending and baking it takes all my time. But after leaving Fort Laramie I will do as much as I can. I will try and get an almanac there, as I have entirely lost the day of the month as well as the day of the week.²¹

Mary was travelling with three young children, and her journal reflects her concern for them. Her interest in these children always took precedence over writing in her journal. Her journal entries were undated and not written on a regular basis.



Figure 1. Our Camp
Drawing by Mary Powers²²

Some of the original diaries and journals preserve more than just the women's words. Caroline Richardson's and Harriet Ward's journals bear the imprints of flowers that the women gathered along the trail and pressed between the pages. Lizzie Richardson's childish signature is written on otherwise black pages at the end of her mother's journal. Lizzie also drew some pictures in her mother's book.²³

Recipes appear in a few diaries. Mary Fish's journal ends with twelve recipes.²⁴

REASONS FOR WRITING

In all of these ways the women were expressing themselves, trying to capture forever a moment, a feeling, an adventure, a flower, or even a food from one of the big experiences in their lives during the journey of 2,000 miles across a wilderness. Even though they shared a common purpose, each was writing for a different reason and for a different audience.

Some were communicating to others and some wrote just for themselves, for personal satisfaction and even for private meditation. Four women mentioned that they were writing journals or letters for publication and at least two were published. Elizabeth Wood's journal of 1851 and Sarah Herndon's letters of 1865 were published in newspapers. Kate Dunlap and Mary Stuart Bailey mentioned in their journals that they were writing for future publication.

Five letter writers were communicating with people back home, and one letter was published in 1846 in a newspaper. Tamsen Donner wrote a letter to a friend, and the New York Herald printed her letter in its columns accompanied by an editor's comment that Mrs. Donner was a "perfect specimen of our

American women-intelligent, educated, brave, and spirited. If the rest of the females of the expedition are like Mrs. Donner, there need be no fear of the expedition."²⁵ It is an irony that this same "brave and spirited" woman lost her life along with other members of the ill-fated Donner party in the mountains of California, and the newspaper who had extolled her virtue failed to mention her fate in later issues.

Twelve year old Virginia Reed (also in the Donner party) wrote her letter to her cousin. She wrote another letter home some weeks after she arrived in California describing the horrors of last part of her journey.²⁶

Rachel Fisher described the deaths of her husband and her daughter on the trail in two letters which she sent home to her parents in 1846. In 1852 and 1853 Lucy Cooke addressed her letters to her sister but also invited anyone who was interested to read them.²⁷ In 1852 Mary Dutro addressed her three letters to her sister.

Diaries and journals written on the trail were often painstakingly hand-copied and sent home as letters either in parts or complete. Narcissa Whitman explained in her 1836 trail journal that she was keeping a journal because her mother suggested it. She sent parts of her journal home with people along the trail who were travelling east.

In 1838 Sarah Smith wrote her diary to send home. Soon after her arrival in Oregon in 1847 Elizabeth Geer copied her trail diary and sent it to some of her friends in La Porte, Indiana. Algeline Ashley also sent home the one surviving part of her diary which narrates her trip from Fort Laramie to Salt Lake City. As she described the fort at the beginning of this section of her diary, Algeline wrote, "We wrote from here" indicating that she may have mailed the first part at the fort. Mary Warner wrote that she would send her journal home to her mother.

Two of the women said that they were keeping records on the trail to aid others who were planning to go west in the future. In 1853 Elizabeth Goltra recorded the conditions of travel for friends in Illinois who planned to go west in the following year. Helen Carpenter was also making a record of her trip to help others who planned to travel the trail. On June 4, 1856 Helen wrote, "It is of the utmost importance to know where water is to be found, and not knowing but this journal may some day be of service to someone as a guidebook, I more carefully note where there is wood and water than I otherwise would."²⁸

Rebecca Ketcham's journal was "written for the benefit of friends who may be interested."²⁹ A friend gave Agnes Stewart her diary book, so Agnes wrote to her friend and even addressed some entries to this friend. Harriet Ward wrote her journal to tell her friends and her family in the East about her trip.

In her diary Lucy Cooke explained her purpose for writing. "I intend keeping a kind of journal of passing events whilst on my road to California. Cannot say what amusement it may afford myself or any other person, but think my dear sister, for whom these lines are intended, will be interested in their perusal."³⁰

Some of the women wrote their diaries and journals for personal reasons. Mollie Sanford started her journal with an explanation about the intellectual exercise of writing a daily journal.

I have thought for years that I would keep a journal. I know it is a source of improvement and pleasure, and have only postponed it, because I have thought my life too monotonous to prove interesting. In going to a new country, where new scenes and new associations will come into my life, there may be some experiences worth recording, at least the employment will divert my mind in many a lonely hour.

After keeping her journal for several years Mollie began to treasure her journal and found a new value and satisfaction in it. She wrote, "I desire

that it (this journal) shall be kept in the family and treasured as a relic of by-gone days, not from any especial merit it possesses but because I do not want to be forgotten."³²

Two women used their journals to record religious meditations and prayer. Eliza Spalding recorded religious meditations and prayers in her book. Maria Belshaw ended many daily entries in her 1853 trail journal with a prayer. On May 20th she wrote, "O God wilt thou keep us safe this night."³³ August 21st when her husband was ill she closed the entry with the prayer, "O Father, wilt thou lay thy helping hand, again restore him to health."³⁴

CHAPTER 1 FOOTNOTES

- ¹Harriet Clark's manuscript diary is in the Oregon Historical Society Library in Portland, Oregon. Agnes Stewart's manuscript diary is privately owned by Mr. Ivan Warner. Abby Fulkerth's and Louisa Rahm's manuscript diaries are in the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.
- ²Rebecca Ketcham's manuscript journal is in the manuscript collection at the Chicago Historical Society. Harriet Ward's manuscript journal is in the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.
- ³Velina Williams' manuscript diary is owned by O. A. Stearns. Mary Fish's manuscript journal is in the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. Sarah Sutton's manuscript diary is privately owned by Howard Giesy. Caroline Richardson's manuscript journal is in the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.
- ⁴Charlotte Pengra's manuscript journal is privately owned by Olof Olsson of Portland, Oregon. Esther Lyman's original journal was lost but a letter in which she had copied parts of her diary is owned by Mr. Vernon White. Elizabeth Geer's manuscript diary is in the Oregon Historical Library, Portland.
- ⁵Harriet Ward, Prairie Schooner Lady (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1959), p. 69.
- ⁶Lucy Cooke, Crossing the Plains in 1852 (Modesto, California: privately printed, 1923), p. 37.
- ⁷*Ibid.*, p. 29.
- ⁸Mary Parkhurst Warner, "Journal of Mary E. Parkhurst Warner Kept During Camp Life in 1864," Overland Journeys Collection, The Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, June 20 entry.
- ⁹Elizabeth Wood, "Journal of a Trip to Oregon 1851," Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society 27 (1926), p. 192.
- ¹⁰Sarah Herndon, Days on the Road (New York: Burr Printing House), p. I.
- ¹¹Helen Stewart, "Diary of Helen Stewart 1853," photocopy, Lane County Historical Society, Eugene, Oregon, p. 4.

- 12 Mollie Dorsey Sanford, Mollie (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), p. 119.
- 13 Ward, p. 27.
- 14 Ward, p. 148.
- 15 Algeline Ashley, "Dairy of Mrs. Algeline Jackson Ashley Crossing the Plains in 1852," Typescript, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California, p. 2.
- 16 Mary Outro, "Letter, 24 April 1852," Archives, Jackson County Historical Society, Independence, Missouri.
- 17 Elizabeth Geer, "The Diary of Elizabeth Dixon Smith," in Covered Wagon Women, ed. Kenneth L. Holmes, (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1938), I: 161.
- 18 Mrs. E. A. Hadley, "Diary of Mrs. E. A. Hadley 1851," Typescript in Overland Journal Collection, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, p. 11. Mrs. Hadley's given name is not known.
- 19 Ibid., p. 30.
- 20 Marie Norton, "A Trip Across the Plains in '59," Typescript on Microfilm, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.
- 21 Mary Powers, "A Woman's Overland Journal to California, 1856," The Amateur Book Collector I, nos. 1-5 (September 1950--January 1951): p. 1.
- 22 Ibid., p. 2.
- 23 Caroline Richardson, "Dairy 1952 from Nebraska to California," Manuscript in Overland Journey Collection, The Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.
- 24 Mary Fish, "Diary 1860," Manuscript in Overland Journey Collection, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.
- 25 John D. UNruh, Jr., The Plains Across (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 21.
- 26 Virginia Reed, "Letter 1846," in Overland in 1846, ed. Dale Morgan (Georgetown, California, The Talisman Press, 1963), I: 278.
- 27 Cooke, p. 3.
- 28 Helen Carpenter, "A Trip across the Plains in an Ox Wagon 1856," in Ho for California, ed. Sandra Myres (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1980), p. 100.
- 29 Rebecca Ketcham, "From Ithaca to Clatsop," Oregon Historical Quarterly (September and December 1961), p. 100.

³⁰ Cooke, p. 20.

³¹ Sanford, p. 1.

³² Ibid. p. I.

³³ Maria Belshaw, "Diary 1853," Mss 1508 Overland Journeys Collection, Oregon Historical Society Library, Portland, p. 10.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 33.

CHAPTER 2 THE TRAIL--THE WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE

"Our men are all well armed. William carries a brace of pistols and a bowie knife. Ain't that blood curdling!"--Lucy Cooke

"Mr. Ermatinger says we are on the backbone of America."--Myra Eells

"I have heard lots of bugbear stories about the Indians."--Charlotte Pengra

"Never take no cutoffs and hurry along as fast as you can."--Virginia Reed

"They come out by the thousands and want pay for us crossing their country."--Keturah Belknap

The women journal writers on the Oregon/California Trail were astute observers; they noticed and described the things that were most interesting to them as women. The descriptions written by these 63 women paint an accurate and composite picture of the children, other emigrants, notable trail landmarks, fur traders, Indians and Mormons on the trail between 1836 and 1865.

CHILDREN ON THE TRAIL

On the trail as at home the women were usually closely associated with and were responsible for the children. Children worked and played all of the way to California/Oregon, and occasionally they became ill or were victims of accidents. The women described these activities and provided a valuable record of the children on the trail that cannot be found in the men's diaries, journals, and letters.

Fourteen-year-old Sallie Hester described her activities on the trail as she played and interacted with younger children and other teenagers. On one occasion she and her companions frightened their parents by exploring at Devil's Gate (Wyoming) and staying away too long from the wagon train. Sallie wrote,

...It's an opening in the mountain through which the Sweetwater River flows. Several of us climbed this mountain, somewhat perilous for youngsters not over fourteen. We made our way to the very edge of the cliff and looked down. We could hear the water dashing, splashing, and roaring as if angry at the small space through which it was forced to pass. We were gone so long that the train was stopped and men sent out in search of us. We made all sorts of promises to remain in sight in the future. John Owens, a son of the minister, my brother John, sister Lottie, and myself were the quartet."¹

From Sallie's perspective the trail experience was a good one. The children and young people in her train had frequent opportunities to play, fish, swim, sing, explore, and to make new friends.

Snowballing, leapfrogging, swinging, and playing ball were other activities which children enjoyed on the trail according to the women's journals. Sarah Sutton and Mrs. Hadley described children having snowball fights in the mountains. In 1854 Sarah wrote, "...the youngsters are threatening snowballing each other..."²

Mrs. Hadley reported in her diary, "Boys had quite a snowballing."³

Helen Stewart described some boys playing. "They have had a game at leap the frog, a play which I have often heard of but never saw."⁴

As a fifteen-year-old girl on the trail, Mary Warner enjoyed swinging one evening. On May 22 she wrote, "When we returned to camp there was a swing put up..."⁵

Ball games, probably baseball, were frequently organized when the wagons stopped. Mary Warner played ball with other youngsters, but Helen Stewart watched a ball game while she wrote in her journal.

Children played whether the wagons were moving or stopped. Helen Carpenter described the children in the wagon in front of hers. "Mr. Taylor's wagon is just ahead of ours and the children amuse themselves peeping out of the back of the wagon."⁶

Children played while their mothers cooked. Eliza McAuley was amused

as she and her sister cooked desserts. She wrote, "We have fun making pop corn candy. Margaret is baking cookies, but the boys steal them as fast as she can bake them."⁷

On the trail there were chores for the children to do, milking cows, herding sheep, tending chickens, even herding cattle. Amelia Knight described her children's work. She wrote, "It is all hurry and bustle to get things in order. It's children milk the cows, all hands help yoke these cattle, the de-l's (sic) in them. Plutarch (her son) answers, 'I can't, I must hold the tent up, it is blowing away.'"⁸

The children seemed to adapt happily to the lifestyle of the trail, and after several months of travel even the little ones became suntanned and satisfied. Lucy Cooke described her little daughter after a few weeks of travel, "My dear little girl is quite well and brown as a berry. She has not commenced cutting teeth yet, but she says Dad-Dad so sweetly."⁹

Some children adapted so well to the trail life that they found it difficult to readjust to the civilized life at the end of the trail when the family moved into a cabin or a house. Helen Carpenter's baby sister surprised her family when she became frightened on her first night in a cabin in California. Helen wrote, "The baby, now seven-months old got badly frightened on hearing it tick (a clock). In fact she was so afraid of indoors that she was repeatedly taken outside, that being the only thing that would pacify her. In our travels she has become a child of nature."¹⁰

The trail lifestyle was fun but also hazardous. There were no completely safe places, wagons could turn over, livestock could stampede or run away, rivers and streams were always dangers, and sudden storms could bring hail, lightning, and high winds.

Accidents involving children are recounted in most of the women's diaries, journals, and letters. Children frequently got lost or separated from their families or wagon trains. Nearly all of the lost ones described in the diaries and journals were found, often by other emigrants. Amelia Knight and her family accidentally left their daughter behind at one stop. Amelia wrote,

Here we left unknowingly our Lucy behind, not a soul had missed her until we had gone some miles, when we stopped a while to rest the cattle; just then another train drove up behind us with Lucy. She was terribly frightened and so were some more of us when we found out what a narrow escape she had run. She said she was sitting under the bank of the river, when we started, busy watching some wagons cross, and did not know we were ready. And I supposed she was in Mr. Carl's wagon, as he always took care of Francis and Lucy, and I took care of Myra and Chat, when starting she asked for Lucy, and Francis said, 'She is in Mother's wagon.' as she often went there to have her hair combed. It was a lesson for all of us.¹¹

Marie Belshaw described the time when her seven year old son wandered off in the wrong direction and became lost. She wrote,

June 22. While eating William Belshaw and Charles Martin, 7 years of age, started to get a horse. William left Charles to return to the wagon. Charles could not see the wagon, he took the wrong road and got lost. We missed him in about one-half hour, made inquiry but could hear nothing of him. Between 30 and 40 people were out hunting him, but no Charles to be found. Continued the search till sunset. What agony did his parents endure during this time and what anxiety did his friends have until a man came to our wagon at sunset with the news that the child was safe in a camp nine miles from us. He followed the river one-half miles then struck out towards the road and came up to those wagons. They took him in and treated him kindly.¹²

Many children were injured and some killed in accidents along the trail. Falling out of the wagons was the most common injury accident involving children, and almost all journals and diaries record at least one instance when a child fell out of a wagon. Amelia Knight's son Chat fell out of her wagon once and was almost run over by the wagon in a second accident on the following day. Amelia wrote,

Here Chat fell out of the wagon, but did not get hurt much... Here Chat had a very narrow escape from being run over. Just as we were all getting ready to start, Chatfield, the rascal, came around the forward wheel to get into the wagon and at the same moment the cattle started and he fell under the wagon. Somehow he kept from under the wheels and escaped with only a good or I should say, a bad scare. I never was so much frightened in my life. I was in the wagon at the time, putting things in order, and supposed Francis was taking care of him.¹³

Jane Tourtillot described a neighbor's accident. "In the night I heard Mrs. Wilson's baby crying very hard indeed, it had fallen from the wagon...he struck his head."¹⁴

Several children were seriously injured when they were run over by wagons and horses. Catherine Washburn heard about one accident. "...passed a company where a child had fell out of the wagon and was run over it ran over its jaw and shoulder."¹⁵

Charlotte Pengra and Mrs. Francis Sawyer witnessed injury accidents involving children on the trail. Charlotte wrote, "A horse became frightened and run over Mrs. Fordham's little girl--frightened us all very much and her mother more--the little girl was not much hurt."¹⁶

Mrs. Sawyer saw a little boy injured. "Just ahead of us a wagon ran over a little boy and broke both his legs."¹⁷

Harriet Ward provided some medicine for a little boy who was accidentally run over by a wagon. She wrote,

Frank has been over to a neighboring wagon to visit a little boy who received a severe injury by being run over by the wagon a few days since. We met them at a slough some days since and gave the mother some arnica for it, which she thinks helped it very much indeed.¹⁸

A physician in Jane Tourtillot's train was called to see another child from a neighboring train who was run over by a wagon. Jane wrote,

There was a little child run over by a wagon in Walker's train, who are just ahead of us. The child was injured quite seriously... They sent for a German physician that belongs to our train, to see the child that was injured. He said he thought it would get better.¹⁹

On the trail the women were closely associated with their children. As mothers were most often responsible for the children, these accidents as well as other activities involving children were often carefully noted and recorded by women in their diaries, journals, and letters. The play and many leisure activities often involved both the women and their children. Swimming, fishing, hiking, and berry picking were activities that were enjoyed by both the women and their children.²⁰

OTHER EMIGRANTS

Since wagon trains were really travelling communities, they functioned like other communities of their time. The members of the train were curious about each other, made new friends, celebrated marriages and births, mourned deaths, helped each other and shared things, had disagreements and fights even robberies and murders, enjoyed parties, dances, worshipped together, and even celebrated the Fourth of July.

The women were curious about others on the trail, and they observed and then described unusual wagons and people. Paintings and letterings on wagon beds and covers were curiosities. Lucy Cooke camped with the "Bullheads" one night, and she wrote, "...accepted the offer of a company called 'Bull Heads', which sign was painted on their canvas wagon covers, to camp with them that night."²¹

Mollie Sanford noticed the Colorado gold rushers in 1860. She wrote, "On one covered wagon I see lettered 'Pikes Peak or bust' and one returning 'Pikes Peak and busted.'" ²²

A wagon displaying a flag caught Marie Norton's attention, and from that point on in her diary she referred to this as the "flag train." She wrote, "They had a flag on one of the wagons..."²³

Margaret Frink and her husband wrote their name on their wagon in 1850. In her journal she wrote, "He knew our wagon from the name on the side."²⁴

Unusual conveyances were also attention getters. In 1852 Lydia Rudd saw a man pushing a wheelbarrow to California, and she wrote, "...a man came along with a wheelbarrow going to California; he's a Dutchman--he wheels his provisions and clothing all day--he eats raw meat and bread for supper."²⁵

Lucy Cooke noted five men pulling a conveyance which she described as a truck.

Nearby were five men who draw a truck. We first saw them last Sunday, and our boys made lots of fun of them... We passed the five men with their truck, poor fellows. It had broken down, and they have now taken pieces of it for poles, and thus slung on their provisions, and carry on their shoulders.²⁶

Margaret Frink described some unusual emigrants on the California Trail in 1850. She wrote,

There were all conceivable kinds of conveyances. There was a cart drawn by one ox, and a man on horseback drove along an ox packed with his provisions and blankets. There was a man with a hand cart another with a wheelbarrow loaded with supplies... Among the crowds on foot a negro woman came tramping along through the heat and dust carrying a cast-iron bake oven on her head, with her provisions and blanket piled on top, all she possesses in the world, bravely pushing on for California.²⁷

Even ordinary wagons occasionally carried unusual passengers. Helen Carpenter was moved when she was a grandmother sitting in a rocking chair at the back of a wagon. Helen wrote,

The Innmanns have been with us for ten days, yet we did not know that there was a grandmother in their party until today after the wagons were emptied when she was seen sitting in a rocking chair looking out of the back of the wagon. In answer to inquiries she said that she was large and feeble and could not get out and in without help so she just stayed in the wagon.²⁸

Deaths, marriages, and births occurred in these travelling communities and were often accompanied by appropriate ceremonies and observances on the trail. Funeral services were brief and all too frequent. They were usually held during the noon break in travel or in the morning or evening at the camping place.

Graves were marked by rocks, slabs of wood, or occasionally a wagon wheel or wagon tongue. The name of the deceased, the date, and the circumstances surrounding the death were sometimes written on the tomb-marker to be read by future trail travellers passing by. One grave along the trail near the Big Blue River crossing in Kansas attracted a lot of attention and comment because it occurred early in the emigration in 1846 and would be passed by thousands of emigrants in years to come. Sarah Keyes was nearly blind and deaf as she was travelling west with her grandson James Reed, and she died on Friday.

be with her only son who was in Oregon. Every member of the company attended this funeral which was described in a letter written by her great-grand-daughter Virginia Reed. Virginia wrote,

...we came to the blue--the water was so hye we had to stay thare four days--in the mean time gramma died she became speechless the day before she died. We buried her very decent. We made a nete coffin and buried her under a tree we had a head stone and had her name cutonit and the date and yere verry nice, and at the head of the grave was a tree we cut some letters on it the young men soded it all ofer and put Flores on it.²⁹

This funeral for Grandma Keyes was somewhat typical of other funerals on the trail. Burying the dead was considered a "common decency" and even when emigrants found a murdered stranger they performed a brief service and buried him. Catherine Washburn's party found a murdered man and buried him on August 26, 1853. She wrote,

...started down the Blue Mountains we struck some steep hills about noon we found a murdered man in a pine grove his pockets were rifled and he was shot through the head we buried him as well as circumstances would admit of³⁰

When they were available, clergymen often presided over funerals and marriages on the trail. Helen Stewart's sister was married at the jumping-off place in St. Joseph, but Helen did not record any details of the ceremony. She wrote, "Another of my dear sisters has left the pleasant hearth of her father to enjoy another it appears she has joined heart and hand with Frederick Warner on the eve of our leaving St. Joseph on our long tiresome journey." ³¹

One couple was married on the north side of the Platte River in 1853, and Marie Belshaw wrote a brief note in her journal about it. "One couple married on the north side of river today they came over for a minister and he crossed over and married them." ³²

Clergymen and physicians on the trail both performed their duties as they journeyed west. Physicians and doctors attended the ill and the injured and delivered babies. A large percentage of births on the trail were attended by physicians, midwives, or other women who had received some medical training. Small trains often stopped and laid over for two or three days for a birth. In large trains usually just a few wagons laid over. The birth of a child was good news which the women noted in their journals, diaries, and letters. ³³

In good times and in bad times cooperation was usually the mood of the wagon trains, and the women emigrants were notable for their spirit of cooperation. Kate Dunlap noted this spirit of cooperation in her diary in 1864.

We see many instances of manly generosity on the plains. There is no place in the world where the qualities of a man will show themselves sooner than in crossing the plains, let them be good or bad. I have met with men and women who were like brothers and sisters to me.³⁴

The women shared food, cared for the sick and injured when a doctor was not available, took in widows and children who were in need of help due to the death or illness of a husband or parents, and even nursed the babies of other mothers who became ill or died enroute.

Milk and butter were food products that were often shared. Harriet Ward got some cream and milk from her neighbors. She wrote, "Called upon our neighbors at the next encampment, a family from Missouri who had kindly sent us cream and milk for our coffee." ³⁵

Lodisa Frizzell borrowed a cow to milk from a family who joined her train. In her journal she wrote,

...here we were joined by two teams, a man and his family and his widowed sister with her family... they had five or six cows which gave milk, they gave me an excellent one to milk for they had more than they could well tend to and we were willing that they should travel with us which they did to the end of our journey.

Emigrants frequently shared meat from successful hunts. Buffalo, antelope, and smaller game were shared with neighbors on the trail. Mary Burrel, Harriet Griswold, and Susan Cranstone received meat from neighbors. Mary got some ducks to eat. She wrote, "Foster and man shot several ducks and divided with us, fish plenty in stream." ³⁷

Harriet got some buffalo steak. She wrote, "Had buffalo steak for

supper given us by some neighboring campers who killed it this morning."³⁸

Susan Cranstone received some buffalo meat from neighbors. "A company just ahead of us killed two buffaloes and gave us all the meat we wanted and one of our company killed an antelope."³⁹

People who became lost from their train or who suffered from other bad luck often found refuge and food with other emigrants. Kate Dunlap and others were concerned about a lost woman, and she wrote, "There was quite an excitement among the several camps as a lost woman was wandering about seeking her train but could not find it."⁴⁰

Margaret Frink fed a hungry man as they reached the Humboldt River. She recorded,

While I was in camp there came along a man who had lost everything. He had one pint of corn meal left. He was without shoes, and his feet were tied up in rags. I made a dish of gruel, into which I put a little butter, with some other nourishing things.⁴¹

Helen Stewart and her party took in a widow and her family after the husband drowned when a ferry boat sunk. Helen wrote, "We was within three miles of the ferry when the ferry boat sunk and dround three men, one of them was an imigrant his widow and family is in our company now we will have to go to Iowa Point."⁴²

A sick man needed food and a place to stay so Charlotte Pengra agreed to help him. She wrote, "...had only time to pitch our tent when a sick man returning home called for shelter and lodging, which we granted. Glad to do something to help the needy. He had not been here long till a tremendous storm came on..."⁴³

Helen Carpenter's mother nursed and cared for another woman's baby while the mother was ill. This baby lived several days but died on the trail. Helen wrote,

Here we came up with Farmer's train which was lying by on account of the illness of Mrs. Wilson, Mr. Farmer's married daughter who had a baby that had come prematurely and some one else that was sick. Mother at once took the baby and is nursing and caring for it.⁴⁴

Margaret Frink witnessed a different kind of generosity and cooperation among the emigrants.

...the young men came across a young cow tied up to some willow bushes with a card fastened to her horns, on which was written the statement that nothing was the matter with the cow, that she was only footsore and not able to travel fast, and that any one in want of provisions would be at liberty to kill her for food. This being their desperate case, they stopped, killed the animal, cut the meat into small strips to dry, and travelled on with lightened hearts. The next day they found a sack of flour with a card attached on which was written permission to anyone in need of food to appropriate it to his own use.⁴⁵

It was a common thing for wagon trains to band together and travel in larger groups as they passed through areas where there had been trouble with Indians or robbers. In this way emigrants helped themselves and each other. Harriet Griswold explained how her train did this. "August 22. Started in company with a number of other teams in all 42 men on account of trouble with Indians. We have joined together for safety to protect each other in case of attack."⁴⁶

Serious illness on the trail was usually treated by a physician according to most reports in the women's journals and diaries, but sometimes the women cared for the sick and injured. Harriet Ward helped an ill friend. She wrote,

At eve our dear Mrs. Quigley was taken very ill, but with Mrs. Fox and myself for nurse and physician both, she has done nicely and I hope she will soon recover and enjoy the remainder of her journey free from illness.⁴⁷

Lydia Rudd got medicine from a doctor in another train to treat her husband. She wrote, "Harry has taken a chill this morning...called a physician...Dr. Henry has overtaken us tonight and we have got medicine from him."⁴⁸

The spirit of cooperation extended to California and Oregon. At the end of the trail emigrants were often out of supplies, money, and even oxen or horses to transport their goods. Relief parties were sent eastward from the settlements in California to give food and help. In 1853 Ester Lyman was impressed by the magnitude of this charity. She described the generosity of one man who had sent help to 1500 emigrants who were in trouble because they had tried a very difficult and dangerous shortcut. Ester was on this shortcut when she wrote,

It was estimated that there were nine-hundred wagons, 1,500 persons on the road we were in the last train of waggons and passed the whole emigration with the exception of one team before we got into the valley. After we got down the worst of the mountains we every few miles met fresh cattle some to bring out the emigrants and other for beef and such cattle you never saw in your life, so large and fat. At one place a thousand pounds of flour, fifty bushel of potatoes, a hundred weight of bacon were left by the partys with a notice to the emigrants to help themselves, all a free offering of one man.⁴⁹

Although the spirit of friendly cooperation was prevalent on the trail, there were also many occasions when there were serious disagreements and disturbances among the emigrants. Conflicts sometimes resulted in injury and even bloodshed. Since the emigrants on the trail were outside the jurisdiction of the United States, law enforcement and justice was administered by elected wagon train officials according to a code of laws adopted by the train after a vote by the male adults. This trail justice had to be simple and swift so the train was not delayed.

Murder, robbery, and domestic violence were the three types of conflicts which were most frequently reported in the journals, diaries, and letters. Several of the women journalists either witnessed or heard first hand reports of murders on the trail. Esther Hanna was one day behind a train in which there was a murder, and she passed the graves of the murdered and the murderer. She wrote,

Saw three graves, one of them the grave of a man who was murdered yesterday, his name was Miller, the name of his murderer was Tate who killed him in cold blood...(next day)
 Saw three graves, one was the grave of Tate the murderer of Miller, he was taken the next day after he committed the awful deed, tried by his company and some other, then hung. 'Tis awful to think of his fate yet was just.⁵⁰ (in the Black Hills)

Eliza McAuley was probably describing this same incident in 1852 in her journal. She wrote, "We heard today the particulars about a tragedy across the River. There were two men and a woman concerned. The woman's husband attacked the other man and stabbed him to death. He was tried, convicted, and hung, and the woman was sent back to the Fort."⁵¹

A short time later Eliza's party found the body of a murdered woman. "Tonight we heard that the body of a woman, who had been murdered, was found hidden in a clump of rose bushes near where we had been,"⁵² wrote Eliza.

Robberies seemed to occur more frequently in the later years of travel on the trail. More robberies seemed to be reported at the western one-fourth of the trail. In 1860 Mary Jane Guill saw some men rob a trading post located just west of Independence Rock (Wyoming). She wrote,

July 5. Travel about four miles pass Trading station near Independence Rock. Mr. Guill got a pair of hobbles made for Corie paid three dollars for them. Quite an excitement raised by a company of emigrants before us. They had all passed on, had got as far as the rock when five of the boys went on top, cut up a good many extras then come down and went back to the stree(?) and went into the blacksmith shop and two of them rogues-one stole a pair of ox shoes and the others a butcher knife. The Frenchman followed an overtook them, shot at them three or four. The first shot took effect in the foot of the one who stole the shoes. The company all was from Wisconsin, a very rough set too.⁵³

Harriet Ward heard rumors about an organized band of robbers in the mountains of Utah, but she did not encounter them. She wrote, "It is said we are now in the immediate vicinity of an organized band of Mountaineer Robbers."⁵⁴

Domestic arguments and fights were other sources of violence on

the trail. In 1847 Elizabeth Geer witnessed one woman's rebellion. Elizabeth described the scene.

September 15. Laid by. This morning one company moved on except one family. The woman got mad and would not budge, nor let the children go. He had his cattle hitched on for three hours and coaxing her to go, but she would not stir. I told my husband the circumstance, and he and Adam Polk and Mr. Kimball went and took each one a young one and crammed them in the wagon and her husband drove off and left her sitting. She got up, took the back track and travelled out of sight. Cut across, overtook her husband. Meantime he sent his boy back to camp after a horse that he had left and when she came up her husband says, 'Did you meet John?' 'Yes,' was the reply, 'and I picked up a stone and knocked out his brains.' Her husband went back to ascertain the truth, and while he was gone she set one of his wagons on fire, which was loaded with store goods. The cover burnt off and same valuable articles. He saw the flames and came running and put it out, and then mustered spunk enough to give her a good flogging. Her name is Marcum. She is cousin to Adam Polk's wife.

In 1848 Keturah Belknap overheard an argument in a nearby wagon. This argument erupted into a fight, but there were no injuries. Keturah wrote,

Overheard argument in the next wagon behind ours a man and wife are quarrelling she wants him to turn back and he won't so she says she will go and leave him-that these men will furnish her a horse and she will leave him with the children and he will have a good time with that crying baby then he used some very bad words and said he would put it out of the way -just then I heard a muffled cry and a heavy thud as tho something was thrown against the wagon box and she said, 'Oh you've killed it' and he swore some more and told her to keep her mouth shut or he would give her some of the same. Just then the word came 'Change guards!' Geo came in and Mr. Kittridge went out so he and his wife were parted for the night. The baby was not killed.

Agnes Stewart wrote about the disagreements between two young men in her party. "Today we had a quarrel. Tom and as usual Fred came to blows. Tom and Fred are always quarrelling about something." Agnes later married this quarrelling Tom Warner.

Often the punishments for crimes and disputes were separation or banishment from the wagon train. The banished emigrant had the choices of trying to make it to California or Oregon alone, returning home, or joining another train if the banished person could find a train that would accept

him or her. Only in a few cases were the criminals hanged on the spot as reported by Esther Hanna and Eliza McAuley.

Although several crimes were reported by the 63 women journal writers, conflicts were the exception and the spirit of cooperation and the feelings of loyalty were the rule in these travelling communities. As the days of travelling turned into weeks and the weeks into months, the emigrants developed strong feelings of loyalty and comradeship as they faced common dangers, experienced the same hardships, and shared the adventures of the journey across the wilderness.

These travelling communities often celebrated and played together when their schedule permitted it. The Fourth of July was a holiday that nearly all of the emigrants observed with some kind of celebration on the trail.

On July Fourth the women reminisced about family and friends they had left behind, they cooked special meals, and they often attended patriotic orations, speeches, and dances on the trail. Guns were fired and fireworks were enjoyed by a few parties, and most of the women writers made a special effort to record their holiday activities in the wilderness.

Thirty-five women described their Fourth of July activities in their diaries and journals. Reading and comparing these Fourth of July entries reveal a lot about the writer's attitude at this point on the journey and about the conditions of the party and their equipment, food supplies, and livestock.

Sarah Smith and Myra Eells were at the fur traders rendezvous in Wyoming on July 4th, 1938. Sarah wrote, "Independence day. I suppose you are having some celebrations in New England. I spend the morning washing and made a biscuit pudding for dinner. Received a call from an

Indian with nothing on but a buffalo hide."⁵⁸

Myra wrote, " No church bells, no beating of drums or roaring of cannons to remind us of our blood-bought liberty. How different from one year ago."⁵⁹

In 1846 Virginia Reed was on the Platte River a few days east of Independence Rock (Wyoming). She was in the Donner party which was caught in the mountains of California in a blizzard. Virginia survived this nightmare, but other members of the Donner party starved and froze to death before reaching California. In a letter Virginia wrote,

We celebrated the 4th of July on the Platte at Beaver Creek. Several of the gentlemen in Springfield gave paw a botel of licker and said it whouden be opend till the 4 day of July and paw was to look to the east and drink it and they was to look to the west and drink it at 12 o'clock. paw treted the compiany and we all had some lemminade.⁶⁰

In the next year Keturah Belknap's party had travelled fast and was at Green River, well west of Independence Rock. She wrote in 1848,

It is the 4th of July...we are coming near the Green River, will have to ferry it with the wagons. The cattle will be unyoked and swim over. Some Mormons are here they have fixed up a ferry and will take us over for a dollar a wagon. It will take all day to get over.⁶¹

In 1850 Margaret Frink was travelling in the mountains west of Ham's Fork and did not stop to celebrate, but she noted that she prepared a special meal to celebrate the holiday. She wrote, "July 4. Notwithstanding our anxiety and fatigue, our dinner, in honor of the national anniversary was the best we could provide. The last of our potatoes, which had long been saved for the occasion, made it a rare feast."⁶²

In 1851 Elizabeth Wood was just east of Independence Rock and Mrs. Hadley and Harriet Clark were west of the landmark. Elizabeth wrote,

July 4. Today we traveled till noon and then stopped to get a 4th of July dinner and to celebrate our nation's birthday. While making the preparations, and reflecting at the same time of what the people of Morton and Peoria were doing, and contrasting my

situation with what it was this day last year, a storm arose, blew over all the tents but two, capsized our stove with its delicious viands, set one wagon on fire, and for a while produced not a little confusion in the camp. No serious injury, however was done. After the storm was over, we put up the stove, straightened up the tent, got as nice a dinner as we had upon the Glorious Fourth in Morton last year. We then took care of our game, consisting of 1 blacktailed deer, 1 antelope and 3 buffalo. Last of all we went to hear an oration delivered by Mr. S. Warden. For your amusement I will give a description of my dress for the occasion; a red calico frock, made for the purpose in the wagons, a pair of mockasins made of buffalo hide, ornamented with silk instead of beads, as I had none of the latter and a hat braided of bullrushes and trimmed with white, red and pink ribbon and white paper. I think I came pretty near looking like a squaw.⁶³

Mrs. Hadley wrote a short entry for the fourth. "July 4 Today has been the 4th, our company and another joining fired guns and drank toasts and had a merry time."⁶⁴

Harriet was four days west of Ft. Bridger when she wrote, "July 4 This morning of the glorious fourth, we breakfasted at six upon trout strawberries and cream. We were roused by Mr. Patton's firing 2 guns in honor of the day and crossed Bear River."⁶⁵

In 1852 Cecelia Adams was still in Nebraska near Chimney Rock when she wrote, "This is a delightful morning. A few birds are trying to sing their Maker's praise. Our thoughts are continually turning homeward. I suppose you all are having a Sabbath School celebration today. We would like to take a sly squint and see what you are doing."⁶⁶

In the same year Mary Stewart Bailey was about 40 miles east of Independence Rock, and Lydia Rudd was only about 15 miles east of the same landmark. Mary wrote, "July 4 Sunday Camped on the sand with sage roots for fuel. It is wintry, cold and somewhat inclined to rain, not pleasant. Rather a dreary Independence Day. We speak of our friends at home. We think they are thinking of us. 'Home Sweet Home.'"⁶⁷

Lydia wrote, "July 4. This is the day of our nations jubilee of liberty. Traveled ten miles and struck the Sweet Water and encamped for

the day to celebrate our independence. We had some gooseberry sauce for dinner gathered from the bluff. Harry killed an antelope."⁶⁸

Both Esther Hanna and Mrs. Sawyer were farther west on the trail.

Esther was travelling west of South Pass when she wrote,

July 4 Sabbath This is the anniversary of our National Independence, we celebrate it on the banks of the Little Sandy- nearly 1000 miles from civilization and more than 2000 miles from our beloved home in Pa. We have cold high winds today blowing the sand and dust in every direction, even our victuals are covered with it before we can eat them. This morning we had another division in our company. Our Captain and two other families left us making in all four wagons and a carriage, they wished to travel today. The company took a vote on it, all the rest wished to remain and they left. We are still a Presbyterian Colony... We had no preaching today owing to high winds whirling the dust in every direction.⁶⁹

Mrs. Sawyer's party was near Soda Springs (Idaho) travelling near the vanguard of that year's emigration when she wrote, "July 5. Lying by today to celebrate the Fourth, as we had to travel yesterday. We went fishing this morning, then came back and cooked a good dinner. We had canned vegetables, fish, rice cakes, and other little dishes."⁷⁰

In 1853 Helen and Agnes Stewart's wagon train was travelling two days east of Independence Rock on the holiday. Helen wrote,

July 4. This is the 4th in the States a great many, nearly all is preparing for pleasure of some kind but we are celebrating it by traveling in sand and dust but we had a great dance tonight Ag and I went up on the hill and talked over old times and repeated some paraphrases and all the like of that and then we came down and danced until nearly one o'clock.⁷¹

On the same day Agnes wrote,

4th of July I am sitting on a little hill above the camp. They are playing the fiddle and dancing-- we finished the 4th of July by dancing. After Helen and I sitting on the hill and moralizing so serious we came down and cut capers like a parcel of fools.

In the same year Celinda Hines and Harriet Ward were in two different trains but were travelling near each other on July 4th. Both would reach Independence Rock on July 5th. Celinda wrote, "July 4 Very warm. Saw a

buffalo chase in the morning. The water in a ravine nearby seems to proceed from snow in the mountains, as it flows by day and ceases by night. We got up an Independence Dinner, all the company eating together. Very pleasant." ⁷³

Harriet travelled hard on the holiday. She wrote,

July 4th. The celebration of our National Independence, which we are so unfortunate as not to have reached Independence Rock, we shall be obliged to celebrate by toiling through the deep sands of the Rocky Mountains. Frankie and myself left the encampment before the company and took a pleasant walk to gather an Independence bouquet for our dear ones at home. ⁷⁴

Both Elizabeth Goltra and Marie Belshaw were camped near Ice Springs only one day west of Independence Rock in 1853. Elizabeth wrote, "July 4th. This is indeed a beautiful morning to celebrate the anniversary of our Independence, but to us it is like all other days, the same work to do, drove 18 miles today and have not much grass for our cattle tonight, passed ice-springs at the right of the road." ⁷⁵

Marie was near the same landmark when she wrote, "Forded the river this morning. Heavy sand roads. Passed a great deal of alkali. Saw an antelope. A gentleman told us one of the company would deliver an oration but we did not hear it. Mr. McCarthy found some of the long looked for ice this morning." ⁷⁶

In 1854 two women wrote in their journals on the Fourth of July, and both had already passed Independence Rock. Mary Burrel was just west of Salt Lake City when she wrote, "July 4. In the eve two Indians came. Put sold them his old coat for 50 cents. He (the Indian) put it on and called himself an Emigrant. Shot off his pistol much to our surprise, but knowing it had not taken effect we had considerable fun with him." ⁷⁷

Sarah Sutton was on the banks of Bear River in western Wyoming when she wrote,

Here comes on the Glorious 4th of July, good health and luck
 attend us...
 Hail the day that brought our freedom.
 Bought with our forefathers' blood.
 Lo their happy sons and daughters
 On this glad and welcome day
 By the springs of mountain waters
 O'er the hills and valleys stray
 Independence then shall clear
 Our path to heaven.⁷⁸

Helen Carpenter's husband cooked pudding for her on the fourth in

1857. She wrote,

July 4th. This has not seemed at all like 'Independence Day'
 but just same old jults with plenty of dust thrown in...As it
 was the 4th Reel (her husband) wanted something extra for supper.
 Well what should it be? He said corn starch. I had never
 heard of that being a 4th of July dish and further more I did
 not know how to cook it. But he did just as Aunt Hannah used to.
 So I stood by and saw him burn his fingers and scorch the
 starch which when done was of the consistency of very thin
 gravy. But we ate it, for on a trip like this, one must not be
 too particular.⁷⁹

In 1859 Harriet Griswold and Maria Norton were on the Platte River

in Nebraska. Harriet's train was pushing to the west and did not stop

to celebrate. She noted, "Cannot spend time to stop to celebrate the day."80

Marie and her family did celebrate. She wrote,

July 4, Monday I was awakened this morning bright and early by
 firing of guns from some distant companies. It seems that they had
 not forgotten Independence Day, if they were far away on the plains
 and from home and friends. Got breakfast quite early, but before
 breakfast the boys fired off some of their 'shooters'...Had some
 apple dumplings for supper, which were very good. We had an
 invitation to stop with a company to a Fourth of July dance, but did
 not accept the invitation. After supper Jack played on his violin,
 and some of the boys sang before retiring.⁸¹

Mary Fish celebrated on the Platte River in 1860, and Mary Jane

Guill was already west of Independence Rock on the same day. Mary wrote,

July 4th. This evening we are encamped on the Platte River in
 sight of four different companies. They have stopped to celebrate
 the glorious fourth and our company have camped for the same purpose.
 There was an oration delivered this afternoon and there was quite
 a respectable audience. The oration was not as good as I have
 heard in the States but it was good as could be expected this side
 of the Black Hills. There was quite a display of female beauty
 present which would do credit to a more civilized region.⁸²

Mary Jane and her family celebrated the holiday with a special meal. She wrote, "July 4 Our Fourth of July dinner. What an excellent dinner have got, got some fresh peaches today and a jack rabbit and some apples. What eaters we are at eleven we struck out again. The little creek we dined on was called fish creek." ⁸³

In 1862 two women observed the fourth but did not really celebrate. Jane Tourtillot did not give a clue about her location on the holiday. She wrote, "Today is the Fourth of July and here we are away off in the wilderness and can't even stay over a day to do any extra cooking. The men fired their guns. We wonder what the folks at home are doing and oh how we wish we were there." ⁸⁴

Louisa Rahm was in Idaho on Friday, July 4, 1862. She wrote, "Men busy working, bridge. Made some pies for dinner boys got back from getting lumber for bridge Was very cold in the evening." ⁸⁵

In 1863 Abby Fulkerth was near Fort Laramie on the holiday. She wrote,

The soldiers have a fourth of July Ball which commenced last night. They came to camp and gave the emigrants a cordial invitation to attend. We all went up a short time we soon came back to camp and went to bed. We are also invited over to the Fort today and tonight to partake of a full supper. ⁸⁶

In 1864 Elizabeth Porter and Kate Dunlop were near Independence Rock. Elizabeth's mention of the holiday was brief. "July 4 The American Flag floats to the breeze." ⁸⁷

Kate Dunlap was at the Ice Springs west of the rock (Wyoming) when she wrote, "Another fourth dawns upon us cold and high winds. I am wondering all the time what our friends are doing at home...July 5 All the emigrants invited to attend a ball at the station last night but none of our party went." ⁸⁸

In the same year Mary Warner was already in California on the holiday. She wrote,

July 4th. In the morning we heard the firing of guns in the direction of Virginia City...About three or four o'clock Uncle Henry came. We all knew him as quick as we saw him. We had the best dinner that we could get, and tried to celebrate the Fourth as well as we could. After supper we played ball and in the evening we had fireworks by the campfire.⁸⁹

Sarah Herndon was on the Platte River for her celebration in 1865.

She wrote,

July 4. We made corral at eleven am the captain announcing 'we will stay four hours.' I do not know if we stopped so soon because it is the Fourth or because it is so intensely warm, and the sun beams so hot, or because it was such a delightful camping place. We had dinner at two. Our bill-of-fare: oyster soup, roast antelope with oyster dressing, cold beans warmed over, dried fruit sauce, and our last cake and custard for dessert. We used the last of our eggs which were packed in salt, it is surprising how nicely they have kept. We had a very enjoyable feast, with an abundance of lemonade without ice. The boys put up a large swing on two large cottonwood trees; two could swing at once with lots of strong arms to send us away up high. We began to file into the road at three pm. Our fun was all too short. Dr. Fletcher rode with Nellie, and Milt Walker with me.⁹⁰

The Fourth of July camping place can be used as a marker to compare the progress of the wagons and to determine if they were behind or ahead of schedule according to other emigrants in other years. Independence Rock by the Fourth of July was an unspoken goal for many emigrants. Those who were farther west on the holiday were making good time and would probably reach their destination ahead of the schedule without great problems. Those who celebrated the Fourth east of Independence Rock were behind and could run into cold weather and snow and were more likely to experience difficulties crossing the mountains of Oregon and California.

Independence Rock (Wyoming) was one of the most often visited and described landmarks along the trail. Most women mentioned it and usually described it in their journals and diaries. Four other landmarks received a lot of attention. Chimney Rock, Devil's Gate, Ice Springs, and Soda Springs were also used like mile markers, indicating and measuring the emigrants' progress across the west.

These natural landmarks were often visited and explored by the emigrants who went on foot and on horseback to climb hills and formations and often to carve their names upon the rocks. The emigrants were nearly all curious to see these landmarks which were described in all the trail guide-books.

In addition to these natural phenomena the trail offered many curiosities along the way. Forts, trading posts, pony express stations, stage coach depots became landmarks along the trail and were observed and often visited by the travellers. The emigrants themselves decorated the trail corridor with signs, signatures, and graffiti written and inscribed on rocks, bones, and trees, and they left a lot of litter along the road.

With hundreds and then thousands of people following the same 'highway' through the wilderness, the landscape along this trail became littered with things that people had abandoned and broken, with carcasses and bones of dead livestock, and even with the graves of emigrants who were casualties on the trail. The quantity of litter increased as the amount of traffic increased.

In addition to the things that were left behind on purpose, there were also a lot of things lost accidentally. The women record that the emigrants lost and found everything from livestock to children, from gold pieces to books. Patty Sessions recorded an incident when a little girl found a valuable gold piece. Patty wrote, "Matthews little girl went down to the river-found a ten dollar gold piece at the edge of the river."⁹¹

A man in Helen Clark's company found a coin. She wrote about the incident, "Thornton finds a two dollar and a one half gold piece."⁹²

Helen Stewart found a pocket book along the trail in 1853. "I found a pocket book containing friendship cards and some poetry and some other things."⁹³

Lucy Cook had a hole in her pocket and lost a dollar in 1952. "William earned a dollar by swimming a horse over for a man. I took the dollar for safe-keeping, but unfortunately I had a hole in my pocket, and so lost it."⁹⁴

Narcissa Whitman had some good advice for all emigrants who lost or abandoned some of their belongings on the trail. She wrote, "The custom of the country is to possess nothing and then you will loose nothing while travelling."⁹⁵

Buffalo bones, tree trunks, and large rocks became emigrant signboards along the trail. People wrote advertisements, directions, messages, and names along the trail from Independence to Oregon and California. Mary Warner amused herself by reading this graffitti in 1864. She wrote in her journal, "I walked nearly all afternoon and amused myself reading of buffalo bones. What do you suppose I find? Names of those gone over the road before us."⁹⁶

In 1857 Dr. J. Noble advertised his services by writing advertisements on buffalo bones and grave markers along the trail. Helen Carpenter was amused by the doctor's ads. She reported, "His ad freshly written in bright red keel was conspicuously placed on each of the cedar slabs to the memory of soldiers, 'Dr. J. Noble.' The Dr. is a deep thinker for no more sightly place could have been selected to catch the eye of the entire traveling public."⁹⁷

Later Helen was surprised when she found a sign with information posted on it about the trail. "A real truly guide board, a very modest one, informs us that it is 12 miles to the Green River."⁹⁸

Margaret Frink described her friend's trail telegraph. In 1850 she wrote,

September 1. Before noon we came to a notice on a tree by the side of the road, saying that the Carson boys had turned off here to find feed and inviting us to follow. We did so, and in a short distance came to a fine meadow. This style of telegraph was in general use on the plains. Notes were often seen stuck in a split rod planted by the side of the road, where everyone could see them.⁹⁹

Even as early as 1852 these signs were numerous along the trail.

Lodisa Frizzell describes buffalo bone signs. "Nearly all the skulls and shoulder blades (buffalo) along the road are more or less written upon."¹⁰⁰

In this same year Lucy Cooke saw a buffalo skull sign left by friends in a train ahead of them. "Today we passed a buffalo skull stuck in the ground on which was the information the Rickey's company had passed there that morning."¹⁰¹

Large rocks along the trail became registries on which passing emigrants carved or wrote their names. Independence Rock was a popular place to write names. Lydia Rudd and Lucy Cooke visited the rock in 1852 to see the names. Lydia wrote, "I saw my husbands name that he put on it in 1849."¹⁰²

Lucy described the writing, "Some names were cut in the rock, others done with tar or white black or red lead, and some few with paint."¹⁰³

As travel increased, new forts trading posts, pony express stations, and stage depots were built along the trail to protect and serve and aid the growing numbers of travellers. Emigrants visited these forts and trading posts to receive mail and to send letters home and to get supplies or make repairs. These buildings were often regarded as welcome signs of civilization in the wilderness.

Mrs. Hadley was glad to see Fort Laramie in 1851. She wrote,

Come to the fort which was beyond all expectation. About as large a town as Henderson and much handsomer. On main street the buildings are brick 3 stories high. Stores in the lower stories. Here you can get almost anything you want. The town

is a square block and brick sidewalks. It is on the south side of Platte. There are quite a number of frame buildings. Here is a good blacksmith shop...The town is at the foot of the mountains in a bend of the river...They have a good ferry at or opposite the fort. The road up on the northside of the river is a new one and comes into the old one about 80 miles above the fort.¹⁰⁴

Mary Fish passed pony express riders, stations, and stage coach depots and noted these in her journal. "July 16 We have passed four stations today. The pony express passed us this afternoon we saw it pass by about twice a week. There is also a line of stages running to California. Each stage has a team of six mules."¹⁰⁵

At these places provisions, fresh livestock, and equipment were offered for sale. Some of these frontier stores also offered surprising things for sale, like newspapers. Eliza McAuley bought a newspaper at one store. "We bought a copy of El Dorado News."¹⁰⁶

Two women even found a newspaper office at Grand Island, Nebraska, in 1860. They bought papers and had papers mailed back east to friends. Mary Guill visited the Huntsman Echo office on June 1st and then she wrote, "Buy some papers from the office here which is something new to us. There is a paper printed here called The Huntsman's Echo. Very nice little paper for the plains."¹⁰⁷

Helen Clark visited the same office on May 23rd. "We came to a printing office this morning and had our names registered to be printed in the 'Huntsman Echo' to be sent to any friend, ours they promised to Wm White 10¢ apiece."¹⁰⁸

The trading posts were the first of these improvements to be built along the trail. These were the outposts or stores which bought, sold, and traded for furs on the American frontier. As the emigrant traffic increased, it was a natural development for these small stores to stock merchandise and offer services to the emigrants. Fur traders, mountain men, and trappers were the frontier entrepreneurs who ran these businesses.

FUR TRADERS AND MOUNTAIN MEN

The women on the trail were curious about these mountain men who lived in the wilderness among the Indians. In their journals the first white women on the trail described the fur trader and their Indian wives with whom the missionaries travelled.

The missionaries who were going to Oregon to live among and serve the Indians were interested in the Indian women who travelled with the fur traders' caravan. Sarah Smith described the wives of Captain Dripps

Several female Indians are journeying with us. The two wives of Capt Dripps. They are trimmed off in high style, I assure you. The oldest wife rides a beautiful white horse, her saddle ornamented with beads and many little gingles. A beautiful white sheepskin covering for the horse, cut in fringes one/half a yard deep, ornamented with collars and a great number of thimbles pierced in the top and hung to the ringe like little balls, making a fine gingle as she rides along. Then comes the rider with her scarlet blanket, painted face and handkerchief on her head, sitting astride. This is the fashion of the country. The second wife acts as an attendant.¹⁰⁹

Laziness, dirtiness, and ignorance were the three main criticisms which the missionary women directed at the fur traders' Indian wives. Sarah summed up her opinions in her journal.

Last eve we received a call from one of the wives of some trader. She was dressed in fine style. Perhaps her dress cost 100 dollars. It was trimmed in beads and other ornaments throughout and beads of a costly kind about her neck. Her dress was mountain sheepskin, white and soft as kid...I certainly never saw so much ornament but it all showed the barrenness of her mind. It is said these trappers take great pleasure in dressing their Indian brides, but care not for their minds.¹¹⁰

Sarah also described the Jim Bridger trading party which they met in Wyoming.

Received a salute from some of Bridger's party who have just arrived. This company consists of about 100 men and perhaps 60 indian females and a great number of half-breed children. Their arrival was attended with firing of guns and noisy shouts. Their appearance was rude and savage, were painted in a most hideous manner.¹¹¹

Myra Eells described the trading caravan with whom she travelled in 1838, and she noted that the wagons in this train were not covered with the traditional white canvas. Instead the wagons were covered with black or dark cloth. She wrote,

There are 10 or 15 Indian women and children (with the train). The company have about 200 horses and mules; we have 21 horses and mules. They (have) 17 carts and waggons, we have one. We have 12 horned cattle. The waggons are all covered with black or dark cloth. The Company generally travel on a fast walk, seldom faster.¹¹²

Many of the women on the trail were curious about the mountain men and the fur traders who lived in the wilderness with the Indians. The women had read about these frontiersmen in the guidebooks and in the newspapers. Heading west on the trail in the 1840s. and 1850s the emigrants often met the fur traders' caravan which was returning to the East loaded with furs.

In the years 1852 and 1854 the emigrants passed fur trading caravans which were returning to St. Louis with furs. In these years the furs were buffalo skins instead of the beaver which had been popular in the first half of the century. The women journal writers in the 50s were just as critical of the traders as the missionary women had been in the 30s .

Esther Hanna was near the Little Blue River when she saw the fur trader caravan returning east on May 22nd. She wrote,

Met a train of fur traders, 18 wagons loaded with furs, they were on their way back to the States. The men were savage looking creatures, part of them Spaniards, one or two indians, and the rest what were once white men, but a season's exposure to all kinds of weather had so tanned them that I scarcely recognized them as such.¹¹³

Two days later Lodisa Frizzell saw this same caravan and wrote,

"Met a company of fur traders with 16 wagons loaded with buffalo robes, they were very singular in appearance looking like so many hugh elephants, and the men, except two were half breeds and Indians, a rougher looking set I never saw."¹¹⁴

On her way to Oregon in 1854 Sarah Sutton met a fur trader caravan which was going east to St. Joseph.

We met eight covered wagons of fur traders going to St. Jo. their wagons were marked buffalo skins, bear skins, tiger skins, monkey skins, wild cat skins, etc. and the men looked like a wild set themselves some of them were dressed in greasy, ragged leather coats and pants and looked as though they come from the wild cat nation.¹¹⁵

These trading caravans returning east and the trading posts and forts along the trail all served the emigrants as post offices or as a postal service. This important service gave the emigrants a good reason to stop at the post or fort or go to the caravans and mail letters home, or pick up mail from friends and family. In the process of mailing letters, the emigrants often transacted other business with the traders such as buying supplies or trading livestock.

The women were often very anxious to receive news from friends and family back home, so they looked forward to their arrival at these frontier post offices. The journalists and diarists often named and described the frontier post offices. Mary Jane Guill went to the post office at Fort Laramie and wrote, "We visited the post office put some letters in the office one to George Williams and home No letters here from home."¹¹⁶

Sarah Herndon saw a post office near Fort Kearney (Nebraska) in a house on the prairie. She wrote, "The gentleman of the house is the postmaster-and has his office in the room across the hall from the parlor. While we were there the coach arrived, and the mail was brought in."¹¹⁷

Many emigrants had to wait until they reached California or Oregon before they received letters from the families and friends they had left four or five months earlier. Margaret Frink wrote, "Today Mr. Frink made a visit to the city of Sacramento to inquire for letters as we had not heard from home since we left Martinsville. He found \$5 worth of letters, the postage being forty cents on each."¹¹⁸

Near the forts and trading posts the emigrants often encountered other people in addition to the traders and soldiers. Indians were often camped in the vicinity of these places, and as the wagon trains passed the Indians often paid a visit to the emigrants. The Indians were probably as curious about the emigrants as the emigrants were curious about the Indians. Some Indians stood and watched Harriet Ward write in her journal; Indians shook hands with the members of Mary Warner's party, and Indian women stared at Helen Clark's bloomers.¹¹⁹

INDIANS

All of the women's journals and most of the diaries contain descriptions of the Indians encountered along the trail. Almost without exception the women emigrants were inquisitive and at the same time apprehensive about the Indians along the trail. Most had apparently read or heard descriptions of the Indians and of Indian atrocities; so the women women looked forward to their first encounter with both curiosity and anxiety.

Since seeing and meeting Indians was a new experience for most of the women journalists on the trail, they usually described the Indians

they met. The women usually interacted with the Indians and often traded, talked, and scrutinized the Indians and then wrote about the encounter in their diaries and journals.

Emigrant women on the trail often had unique relationships with the Indians along the trail. Since the women did not usually threaten the Indians, there was the opportunity for some dialogue and trade.

The women's records of Indians encountered along the Oregon/California Trail are unique and different from the descriptions written by men on the trail. Three facts emerge from the women's journals. (1) Different tribes had different relationships with the trail. (2) The Indians were not barriers to the emigration and they often assisted the emigrants by providing information, food, horses, boats, and labor. (3) The conflicts between Indian and trail travellers increased as time passed beginning with almost no conflicts in the 1830's and 1840's, and increasing in numbers of depredations in the 1850's and 1860's. This is contrary to what should have happened as soldiers were stationed at new forts built along the trail to defend and protect the travellers. It appears that the hostility was actually intensified as the military presence along the trail was increased.

Each leg of the journey presented different Indian tribes to the emigrants. At the eastern end of the trail, the Kansa, the Pottawatomie, and other Indians were friendly and even helpful. These Indians provided ferry boats across large rivers and toll bridges across some of the smaller but difficult rivers and streams. These Indians did annoy some emigrants by coming into the camps and begging for food and trinkets, but they were not considered dangerous.

In 1851 Sarah Cranstone met some Indians at the trail's beginning.

...three Indians, the first that we had seen, met us just at night and followed us to camp. They appeared very friendly and were begging. They had a paper and on it was written with a pencil, 'these are friendly Indians, you had better treat them well.'²⁰

At Kanesville (near Council Bluffs, Iowa) Eliza McAuley was entertained by an Indian camp. She wrote, "At break of day the Indians awoke us singing their morning song. The old chief started the song and the other chimed in and it was very harmonious and pleasing."¹²¹

After the emigrants passed through the Kansa and Pottawatomie lands, they were in Pawnee territory. These Pawnees were often encountered along the Platte River, and again the relationship between emigrant and Indian was usually friendly and often even humorous verbal exchanges were made between Indian and emigrant. Helen Clark wrote about two incidents in 1860 when a Pawnee Indian tried to trade ponies to her husband in exchange for her. She wrote, "We saw some Indians that offered five, six, and ten ponies for me and Mrs. Wimple. One wanted to sell his pony and get her and whisky."¹²²

Two days later some more Indians visited the same wagon train, and Helen wrote,

Three Indians passed us today horseback and they stopped as they passed Mr. Kline, Mrs. Wimple and me, and Mr. Kline wanted to know what they would give for ME and one, the chief held up all his fingers and Mr. Kline asked him if he had three ponies, he gave assent and made room on behind for me when Mr. K. backed out.¹²³

In 1853 Harriet Ward's husband tried to trade for an Indian pony. The only trade the Indians would consider was Ward's daughter. Harriet wrote, "We had been trying a long time to purchase a pony of a fine young Indian, who refused all our efforts but at length rode up and offered two ponies for Frank (Ward's daughter)."¹²⁴

The Pawnees' wickiup villages and nomadic movements interested the emigrant women. In 1853 Helen Stewart and two friends met some Pawnees as the emigrant women were exploring the countryside. Helen wrote in her journal,

Mary, Ag, and I took a walk up some of the high hills and as we was coming back we met two indians one of them was dressed fine he had a brod stripe of beads sowd in the middle of his blanket and his shoulders was just covered with them he had two peaces of some kind of fur and a long plated consurn it looked like a whip fastened to the back of his head and a black bird on the place where they are fastened he had a small looking glass set in wood strung round his nect something to smell also it had a pleasant smell I cannot begin to describe all the fixings he had on the other one had nothing nice only his legins and shoes they were just covered with beads the dressed one was very talkative and wanted me to get on his horse behind him and ride to where the wagon was.¹²⁵

Sarah Sutton saw a village of travelling Pawnees set up camp in minutes as a rainstorm threatened the nomads in 1854. She wrote,

... here come the whole 600 moving their tents. They lash their poles on each side of poneys like shafts and carry their other plunder on the back end of them dragging on the ground and we saw 20 dogs with shafts hauling a six gallon keg and dressed buffalo skins, their tent cover. Their teams went on ahead of us and the men, squaws and papoos and children of all sizes were all among us and our children have swapt bread for a good many strings of beads. We struck in behind them it soon began to rain and first we knew they had built their houses in 20 minutes and was the busiest people you ever saw turning out their horses and gathering weeds to burn.¹²⁶ (125 miles east of Ft. Laramie, Wyoming)

- Kate Dunlop described a Pawnee village on the move in 1864.

Reached the Platte at 11 o'clock-- took our noon rest. Today we passed through two Indian villages. At one of these a white man a trading post. He bought the lame worn out stock of the "pilgrims" at his own price. I notices several half breed children better clad than the rest. At one of the villages Mr. Codington sold a dog to the Indians who at once butchered him for a grand feast. We also met a large company moving. The poles of their wigwams were tied to each side of the ponies, in the manner of shafts, one end dragging on the ground, upon which were their camp equipage, papposes, and squaws, the latter driving. Some are on horseback, some on foot, the whole being a motley looking crew.¹²⁷

The Pawnees were not friendly to the emigrants on all occasions and on a few meeting were accused of purposefully stampeding the emigrants' livestock. In 1853 Maria Belshaw wrote, "June 15 We came to the Indian village two miles from our camp. They all came out and frightened our teams, five of them ran, one yoke was broken Mr. Coonts was run over and hurt."¹²⁸

June 10....the first thing we knew there was about 40 Indians running past the camp trying to take the horses. All the men that was in camp took after them. The men soon all came back except four that had gone a hunting and three that took horses and went to try to rescue the others. Indians went over the bluff found two of the men- T. Hockette and J. M. Robison took guns and all their clothing except and boots and hats found the other two men did not take anything but their shot pouches.¹²⁹

After passing through the Pawnee territory, the emigrants usually met the Sioux. The Sioux were described and identified by more of the emigrant women writers than any other tribe. The women found the Sioux to be everything from kind and harmless people to dangerous and hostile murderers.

Sarah Cranstone and Mrs. Hadley described a village of Sioux in 1851. On May 30th Mrs. Hadley passed their camp and wrote about the 'Soos' she encountered on the Platte.

May 30 Came to an Indian camp about noon where they had quite a little village of wigwams and a great many poneys. They are a tribe of soos. They are kind and hospitable and are the most polite and cleanest tribe on the road. They are whiter, to than any that we have seen. They are well dressed and make a fine appearance, went in one of their houses made of dressed skins sewed together and very large. They are all busy some of them jerking buffalo, some painting skins for boxes which look very nice.¹³⁰

On the next day Sarah, who was travelling in a different wagon train, passed the same Sioux camp and described them in her diary.

May '31. There is a large encampment of them across the river opposite us. They were Shions and Siou who marry and live together yet have each their separate chiefs. The Shions (Cheyennes), a very intelligent looking nation, are said to be wealthy. A little papoose attracted the attention of the whole company. It was dressed in a wild cat skin taken off whole and lined with red flannel and trimmed with beads. There was a Frenchman living with them, said he had been there 32 years.¹³¹

Many women found the Sioux congenial and friendly. In 1852 Algeline Ashley described the village and Lucy Cooke traded with them. Both women met the Indians near Fort Laramie. Algeline wrote,

The Siouxs are established in this part of the country; they keep a great many horses, mules, and ponies for sale and ask from \$100 to \$125 for horses and mules, and from \$65 to \$75 for ponies. There are many French traders with them. They keep a great number of dogs and are very careful to keep them away from the tents. They do not beg but offer to pay for anything they desire. They make their tents of buffalo skin and long poles and carry the poles with them when they move because there is no timber for 200 miles back of the Fort.¹³²

Lucy was impressed with their furs and wrote, "There were a number of Indians around at this place, and I had a good chance to trade for a fur or two. I swapped one of my small blankets for a pretty robe of prairie dog skins. I think there are ten in it, all nicely sewed together."¹³³

In 1850 Margaret Frink was prepared to trade with the Sioux. She wrote,

The squaws were much pleased to see the white squaw in our party as they call me. I had brought a supply of needles and thread, some of which I gave them. We also had some small mirrors in gilt frames and a number of other trinkets with which we could buy fish and fresh buffalo, deer, and antelope meat.¹³⁴

The emigrants were curious about the Sioux burial practices.

Mary Dutro saw a Sioux grave in 1852 as she and some friends were exploring.

In her letter she wrote,

Nattie, Sam Davis Sis and I went off the road some distance today to see an indian grave. We are now passing through the Sioux traibe. They are a very harmless tribe. The way they bury their dead, they plant four posts in the ground about eight or ten feet high and lay sticks across then lay the dead body on that after tying it up in buffalo hides and blankets.¹³⁵

A Sioux child's burial was described by Maria Norton in 1859.

July 24.. We went this morning to see the skeleton of a papoose, which had been buried up in a tree and had fallen down. It was done up in a red handkerchief, with red and blue flannels, and last of all a buffalo robe. It was very much fried and shriveled up; should think that it had been dead quite a while.¹³⁶

After shaking hands with a friendly Sioux brave near Fort Laramie,

Mary Elizabeth Warner wrote in her journal that she was afraid. Her husband

had some fun when he offered to sell his scared wife to the brave. Mary wrote,

One tall fine looking Indian came up to my buggy before I got out and wanted to shake hands. Well of course I shook hands and shook other wise, And then what do you think, asked Warner to sell me for ponies.¹³⁷

Mary's niece, Mary Eliza Warner witnessed this incident and also described it. "May 7 (1 day west of Scotts Bluff) We stopped at noon near an Indian village-about thirty Indians came to camp. Uncle Chester traded Aunt Lizzie off for three ponies but she would not go."¹³⁸

The Sioux shared buffalo meat with Celinda Hines and her family in 1853. She wrote,

... saw some indians chasing buffaloes. It was said there were 50 in the herd. They succeeded in killing a number of them. The chase was very interesting to us. The indians had nothing but halters on their horses...We examined some bows and arrows with which they killed them. The Sioux gave Charles a quarter and offered him another, but he took but one.¹³⁹

Mary Burrel counted the Sioux Indians she passed in one village in 1854 and described their ponies.

June-4. What a sight we have seen today; we met 402 Indians or more. I am certain of this many for I counted them besides ponies and dogs and plenty of children, about two to a man and three ponies to a person and five dogs, half wolf. They had their tent poles fastened on to the ponies on each side, and the provisions and packed on his back and on those poles. Dogs were loaded also. We met them on the hills. They were Sioux and had weapons but were very friendly...Their ponies were decorated with leather coverings and beads worked on them, with many strings cut of leather attached to the edge. Feathers on the horses heads, sometimes a bell on the neck, and a red string or something fastened to the tail, near the crupper. The sight was astonishing, equal to 50 caravans or circuses.¹⁴⁰

Helen Carpenter admired the Sioux braids in her journal entry of June 23, 1857.

(At Ash Hollow)...the camp is full of Sioux indians...They are tall fine looking Indians. The women and men alike wear the hair in two long braids hanging down the back. From its sleek, glossy appearance it shows the care that it receives. The dress is the same as the Pawnees have, government Makinaw three point blankets. They came with moccasins to trade for something to eat.¹⁴¹

Farther west Elizabeth Wood met another Sioux village on the move.

She wrote,

August 6: we passed Fort Hall; met a company of Indians moving; they had their ponys packed with their goods until one would suppose nothing else could be got on them; but on the top of their "plunder" the little papooses were tied, to keep them from falling off. Some of the ponys were rode by the squaws with a papoose lashed to their backs, and in some cases one or two at their sides, or if one, something else to keep up the equilibrium. There were about 20 families of these Indians, seeking for winter quarters.¹⁴²

In 1860 Mary Jane Guill and Helen Clark met some Sioux. Mary Jane wrote in her journal, "June 14 We met a company of Sioux indians moving several dogs pulling carts of poles with their blankets on them and one load of pups." ¹⁴³

On the Platte River in Wyoming Helen wrote,

About 8 o'clock we began to meet Indians and we came to a large village where they were tearing down wigwams preparatory to moving away. The boys judged there were 200 ponies getting packed and saddled. There are swarms of Indians meeting us. Tom, Mr. Walker, Mother and I are all up on the hill when the little squaws come on horseback with beads to sell, so I take a string for five cents. One squaw took a fancy to Mother's fan and especially her parasol-she offered a pair of moccasins for it, but she did not sell it. One old man held both my hands and would not let go for awhile. The Indians all fancy my sleeves and dress and offer all the beads they have for it.¹⁴⁴

In 1853 the women reported violence on the trail, and the Sioux were involved according to Marie Belshaw and Charlotte Pengra. It is not clear what happened, but both women reported murders and the involvement of soldiers from Fort Laramie. On June 16th Charlotte wrote,

Passed. another indian village this morning, called to their wigwams but they appeared very hostile, pointed their guns at us several times...a half-breed that was with them said there had been trouble at the Fort, and that the indians intended attacking the Emigrants. At noon we passed another trader point, they said that there had been a fight the day before, and that six white men and six Indians were killed...150 indians attempted to cross over the ferry which was a violation of their treaty, six only to be allowed to cross at one time. The colonel refused them.¹⁴⁵

Six days later Maria Belshaw wrote in her journal,

June 22. News came this evening that a husband, wife and two children were murdered on Monday the 20th near the Fort on the south side of Platte River. The alarm was given at the Fort the soldiers came and killed one indian wounded one. There were four in the company. They took the dead bodies and the team to the Fort.¹⁴⁶

The Sioux were also involved in an attack on other Indians, and in 1864 one such attack on some Pawnees was described by Mrs. Francis Sawyer. She wrote,

May 26. A large party of Pawnee Indians passed us this morning going to their hunting grounds after buffalo, and this afternoon we met them returning. They had met a party of Sioux, and the result was a battle took place. The Sioux had whipped them, killing and scalping two of the party and wounding several others. The Pawnees were very angry and badly frightened. Some were armed with bows and some with guns...There were only thirteen Sioux and they whipped sixty or seventy Pawnees. When we came to where the battle had been fought, Mr. Sawyer and I drove off the road a short distance to see one of the Indians who had been killed. It was the most horrible sight I ever saw. Four or five arrows were sticking in his body and his scalp was gone, leaving his head bare, bloody and ghastly. I am sorry I went out to look at him.¹⁴⁷

There were other conflicts between Indians and emigrants. In her journal on August 11, 1862, Jane Tourtillot described a massacre along the trail near the Snake River. A train of eleven wagons ahead of them was attacked by Indians and the men killed and wagons plundered. Other emigrants rallied to help this train and tried to recover the stolen livestock, but the rescuers were attacked and more emigrants were killed. It was not clear what actually occurred, but it was reported that over \$6,000 was stolen from one wagon alone. Jane described what she witnessed,

August 10. (near the Snake River)...In a short time the word came back that a train six miles on had been attacked by the indians, and some killed and that was cause enough for the arming. In a short time were met by two men. They wanted us to go a short distance from the road and bring two dead men to their camp, five miles ahead. Albert unloaded his little wagon and sent Gus back with them and about forty armed men from both trains to get them. We learned that a train of eleven wagons had been plundered of all that was in them and the teams taken and the men killed. One was

Mr. Bullwinkle who left us the 25th of last month...he was shot eight times, his dog was shot four times. They took all that he had in his wagon, except his trunks and books and papers...It is supposed that they took six thousand dollars from him...The Captain had a daughter shot and wounded severely. This happened yesterday. This morning a part of their train and part of the Kennedy train went in pursuit of the stock. They were surrounded by Indians on ponies and killed several wounded and two supposed to be killed. ...August 11 The two men we brought up were buried early this morning with the other three, so they laid five men side by side in this vast wilderness killed by guns and arrows of the red demons. The chief appeared yesterday in a suit of Mr. Bullwinkle's on the battlefield... August 12 Capt Adams' daughter died this morning from the effects of her wound. Poor father and mother lost one son and one daughter, all of his teams, clothing and four thousand dollars. Is left dependent on the bounty of strangers.¹⁴⁸

Much of the trail passed across land that was recognized as Indian Territory or Indian reserves and reservations by the United States government. Treaties were made with the Indians to allow emigrants to pass across the Indian lands, but as the number of emigrants swelled to the thousands and the emigrants made new branches off the old trails, the Indians became alarmed by the disappearance of the game upon which their livelihood depended and by the competition for the grass where they grazed their ponies and by the heavy consumption of the water supplies upon which Indian villages depended.

In 1848 the Pawnees demanded pay from the emigrants for crossing Indian lands. Keturah Belknap described this. "They come out by the thousands and want pay for us crossing their country." She does not say whether her train paid for their passage across the Indian lands.¹⁴⁹

Mary Warner noted that the Indians near Fort Laramie did not allow emigrants to graze Indian grasslands. She wrote,

May 8. We passed Laramie about noon. Mr. Lord crossed the river and went over to the Post Office. Went five miles farther...After going five miles we camped on the Platte near some Indian wigwams where we had a very good camping ground. There was good grass but the Indians did not want us to stay there for they wanted the grass for their ponies.¹⁵⁰

The emigrants were not always the victims, sometimes they were the aggressors. A few emigrants plundered and threatened and even killed Indians. Jane Tourtillot recorded one instance when emigrants burned indian houses ten days after the massacre of the wagon train in 1862. She wrote,

August 21. The road was rough some of the way. Some steep hills to pass over. We saw several Indians today for the first time. They were Snakes. One of them said that he was chief. Three of the men in the Newburn train burned their wigwams in their absence. They came on at noon, were very indignant about it and wanted us to pay for it. Captain Walker told them who it was that burned them. They got quite a good deal of bread and bacon from different ones from our camp.¹⁵¹

Patti Sessions needed wood for her cook fire in 1847 and she found an uninhabited wickiup to use for firewood. She wrote, "Found old indian wickeups to burn in it (the stove) we burnt their wickeups for wood." ¹⁵² Incidents like these where emigrants innocently or occasionally not so innocently destroyed indian property could have changed the Indians' attitudes toward the emigrant trespassers on Indian property.

Celinda Hines reported an incident in 1853 when two packers (men returning from Oregon to the States riding mules) shot and killed a Snake Indian who had threatened and shot at them. Fleeing from the Indians, these two packers sought protection for the night in the Hines wagon train. The Train members voted against their staying because there were so many women and children in the train. A nearby train of 21 well-armed men took in the endangered men, and there were no further incidents.¹⁵³

In 1851 Elizabeth Wood described an incident when the Indians did not start the fight. She wrote, "August 19 (near Salmon Falls) This morning we expected a fuss with the Indians; one shot from across the river and killed a cow and then snapped his gun many times at the men, some one of whom had killed the Indians dog. It is not always that the Indians are the aggressors..." ¹⁵⁴

In 1854 Mary Burrell reported that her party drew guns on the Indians who asked them to pay a toll for crossing a bridge. She wrote, "The Indians tried to make us pay toll at the little bridge, but we showed pistols and they let us pass." (near the Elk Horn River)¹⁵⁵ Incidents like these did not create friendly relationships between Indian and emigrant.

In Idaho and Oregon the emigrants frequently traded with the Indians for fish and ponies. On the Boise River in Idaho the Indians liked to get clothing and rifles. Cecelia Adams reported that her company traded guns for ponies in 1853.

These Indians have a great many fine ponies, and most of them have guns and ammunition, and many of them have almost a complete suit of clothes, which they have got of the emigrants. They will trade a very good pony for a good rifle or a coat. Our company traded two guns for two ponies.¹⁵⁶

Lydia Rudd traded her apron to the same Indians in 1852. She wrote, "I traded an apron today for a pair of moccasins of the Indians." A little later Lydia traded an old shirt and some needles for a large salmon. "Bought a salmon fish of an Indian today weighing seven or eight pounds gave him an old shirt, some bread, and a sewing needle."¹⁵⁷

In 1853 Celinda Hines traded clothing for fish. She wrote,

In the morning a great many Indians came to camp with fish which they wished to exchange for clothing. We bought a number...The Indians the Diggers cannot understand the English language...These Indians are dressed in any old clothing they can get from the emigrants. Some of them have on one garment...others are fully clad. They seem most anxious to get shirts and socks.¹⁵⁸

Sarah Cranstone traded for fish several times in Idaho and Oregon. She wrote, "Five more miles to Salmon falls where we encamped for the night. Here the Indians met us with salmon to swap for clothes. The largest weighed 20 pounds." ¹⁵⁹

Elizabeth Goltra recorded that these Indians tried to trade for ammunition and clothing. She wrote, "A few Indians about our camp this morning trading moccasins etc. for shirts, powder and balls..."¹⁶⁰

In Idaho and Oregon the Indians raised vegetables, and the emigrants were hungry for fresh vegetables after several months on the trail without any fresh vegetables. In 1847 Elizabeth Geer found the Indians trading their potatoes and wrote, "October 30 Men making rafts, women cooking and washing Children crying. Indians bartering potatoes for shirts."¹⁶¹

Catherine Washburn ate Indian grown vegetables in 1853. She wrote, "Camped on a spring branch by a Indian garden they had some good corn and potatoes we bought some for supper."¹⁶²

Celinda Hines bought peas and potatoes grown in Indian gardens. She wrote, "In the evening some Indians came, of whom we bought some peas and potatoes, paying \$1.00 for four quarts of peas and the same for one mess of potatoes. These Kayuse Indians seem rather intelligent and often well dressed."¹⁶³

Near Oregon some emigrants traded one kind of food for another. Celinda Hines wrote about her trading encounter with some Indian women.

September 5. Went about seven miles to Grand Ronde...Camped near a pretty mountain stream. Indian loeges near. Thronged with Indians during our stay. Some belong to the Kayuses, some to the Nez Perces...Before noon we met many, mostly women on ponies, who said they were traveling to the Shoshone country. They had peas with them for food which they would swap for flour or bread. One porposed to swap her baby for a skirt.¹⁶⁴

Cecelia Adams found the Indians ready to trade at Bannack Creek. She wrote,

Here we find indians with some very nice salmon for sale and we all got a good supply. They will trade them for powder, lead, caps, bread, beads, brass nails, old shirts, or almost anything you have...where the indians catch their salmon in traps.¹⁶⁵

At Hams Fork Sarah Cranstone found Indians with trout instead of salmon. She wrote, "In four miles we came to Hams Fork, quite a stream. Lots of indians there with trout to swap for bread."¹⁶⁶

Mary Burrel traded her bread for trout. She wrote, "Bought four nice salmon trout of some nearly naked indians for a loaf of bread and some crackers...One indian stole Wes' fishhook and he followed on after him threatening to shoot if not delivered. He gave it up and ran for life."¹⁶⁷

The lifestyle of the Indians of Idaho and Oregon interested the emigrant women. Their diaries and journals contain observations and descriptions of the treatment and dress of Indian children, the foods grown, hunted, and cooked by the Indians, and Indian dances. Narcissa Whitman was moved to pity when she saw an Indian infant whose head was being flattened. In 1836 she wrote,

I saw an infant here (at Cascades) whose head was in the pressing machine. This was a pitiful sight. Its mother took great satisfaction in unbinding and showing its naked head to us. The child lay upon a board between which and its head was a squirrel skin. On its forehead laid a small square cushion, over which was a bandage drawn tight around pressing its head against the board. In this position it is kept three or four months, or longer, until the head becomes a fashionable shape...I saw a child about a year old whose head had been recently released from its pressure as I suppose from its looks. All the back part of it was of a purple color as if it had been sadly bruised. We are told this custom is wearing away very fast, there is only a few tribes on this river who practice it.¹⁶⁸

The Indians' habit of picking nits out of each other hair appalled Helen Stewart in 1853. She wrote, "We was near an indian village...they ware the dirtiest creatures I ever saw they will pick the lice out there head and eat them and then the filth of their clothes..."¹⁶⁹

Sarah Smith witnessed this same activity in 1838. She wrote, "One old squaw was very busy hunting eating lice from her child's head. This is a common practice."¹⁷⁰

Charlotte Pengra was annoyed by another activity of some Indians who were camped near the ferry on the Snake River. Charlotte wrote,

We had an all night serenade by the Indians who have a shade a few rods up the river. They sang or chanted and gambled for Mockingsons leggins and such things all night keeping us awake much of the time. Their music and manner of singing is certainly curious and laughable. They keep time with the body from the hips up making their shoulders and arms move, sometimes rapidly and sometimes slowly.¹⁷¹

A few of the women journal writers became involved with Indians they met on the trail. Myra Eells and Mary Walker sewed dresses for many of the Indian wives of the fur traders in their caravan and at the rendezvous in Wyoming. Eliza Spalding worked to put the Nez Perces language in written form at the mission in the Oregon Territory.¹⁷²

Eliza McAuley became friends with an Indian she met at Smith's Fork of the Bear River while the men in her party were building a new road. Eliza wrote,

1852. At dinner time a very intelligent indian named Poro came to our camp. He says he has been to the Missouri River and seen steamboats and explained by signs what they were like. He seems to understand the customs of the whites very well. In the afternoon he came again, bringing his little boy, four or five years old. He interpreted a number of indian words for us...Poro visited us again and brought his friend Pavee to see us...Old Poro came along about ten o'clock and stayed a long time, teaching us his language. It pleases him very much to see us try to learn it... Poro came twice today to bid us goodbye and feels very sad about our going.¹⁷³

The California-bound emigrants met the Indians of the Great Basin on the last leg of their trip. These tribes included the Shoshone, the Piutes, the Utes, and others. In 1857 Helen Carpenter described some Indian problems near the Humboldt valley on her trip to California.

...He brought back news of Indian depredations. Four or five days ago some two or three wagons were taken and six or seven men and two women were killed. Only one man escaped. As Uncle Sam's had three wagons and a number of men we are feeling anxious about them. Two men of another train were killed and in another a man was wounded. This latter was guarding stock and an Indian crawled

in the grass until near enough to shoot which he did hitting him in the lower part of the leg. There was 300 head of cattle but the Indians only succeeded in running off 60 head and one horse...There is strong talk of starting on an Indian hunt tomorrow. It is said there are 15 trains within four or five miles of us and 200 men. The train that lost the stock has taken an Indian prisoner...a party went out the next day after the stock was taken. They had no difficulty in following the trail of the stock but did not dare to go as far as the party was small. ...The prisoner took the party directly to the Indian camp. Before they were aware of its close proximity Indians were seen running to the brush. They seemed to be all women and children. Only one old man was sighted. He ran in some willows that overhung the creek bank and crawled in. They tried to make him come out, but he would not so they shot into the brush and he immediately set up a very queer wail which was thought to be a death chant. It did not long continue. Three women, the mother and sisters of the prisoner, were captured. Reel (Helen's husband) was riding after one of them when she suddenly dropped to the ground. He was looking ahead when his horse stumbled over her. After dropping to the ground she had crawled back towards him. The party was mostly Missourians, and some of them were disposed to treat the squaws as the Border Ruffians did the women of Kansas. Fortunately there were enough real men to protect the squaws. Some were for having the squaws killed, but they were not injured in any way only held as prisoners until the party was ready to leave. Eighteen head of the stock had been killed and the carcasses were lying near. The skins were already doing duty as 'wickyups'. They were sewed together and stretched around poles set in conical form with an opening at the top for the smoke to escape. The hind quarters seemed to be all they were going to make use of. All the rest of the animal was left...

The squaws were told that unless they brought ten ponies inside of two days that the Indian (prisoner) would be killed. Whether they fully understood it or not they were not certain, but the ponies were not brought. The prisoner was made to drive the cattle back, and some of the party made it as hard for him as they could. He was quite foot sore from running over the rocks. After the cattle were returned to Harp, and the boys had gone to their separate camps, Harp's company whipped the Indian with ramrods raising great welts on his back. Parties interfered and took him to McVay's camp to be set at liberty the next morning.¹⁷⁴

None of the California-bound women liked the eating habits of the Indians at the end of the trail, especially not the locust eaters. Algeline Ashley described these insect eaters, "Crossed Bear River the day before; Saw the Utah Indians gathering locusts in old basins and bags to eat. They gather them very fast, pulling one wing off so they cannot fly. They are very low Indians and very ugly looking."¹⁷⁵

The emigrants traded with these Great Basin Indian tribes. Mary Jane Burrel traded an old white shirt for a looking glass. She wrote, "Many Utah Indians visited our camp at noon. Real imposers on emigrants, beggars. Swapped an old white shirt for a pocket looking glass."¹⁷⁶

The Spanish influence was noted here among the Great Basin Indians just as the French influence was reported among most of the other Indians along the trail. Helen Stewart noted this in her diary in 1853.

There is a great many Spaniards there they all had squaws one of them was making a bonet for her baby...she was putting beads on it...she was putting fringe round the front of it of dimes she had so many of them I counted eleven gold dollars and I do not know how many there might be of dimes...¹⁷⁷

Indian burial practices in the Great Basin differed from the burial customs of the other Indians along the trail. Helen Clark witnessed on Indian burial ceremony in 1860 near Fort Ogden, Utah. She wrote,

There has been two Indian burials not far from our camp. The last was the Chief's brother. He was wrapped in skins tied around him with lariatts and laid upon a horse. He was carried up into the mountains followed by the whole tribe who were howling and screaming most hideously. His horse and colt were sacrificed upon his grave. His bow, gun and other implements were placed in the grave too. After this ceremony was over they returned in great glee through the Fort.¹⁷⁸

Almost all of the women journalists on the trail shared one common opinion about the Indians. Nearly unanimously they disapproved of the marriage of a white man and an Indian woman. Rebecca Ketcham wrote her opinion, "It is perfectly astonishing to me how a man who has ever seen civilized people can intermarry with the natives and be contented to settle down and live as they do."¹⁷⁹

Mary Fish also disapproved. "We saw a white man in one of the lodges (indian) with a squaw so I presume he is for amalgamations."¹⁸⁰

Sarah Sutton did not believe that a white man should marry an Indian woman either. She wrote, "I don't believe any man of a good

principle will live here with the Indians and their smoky buffalo skin wigwams with a slick greasy hole to slip in at like a wolf..."

Rebecca Ketcham did not approve of marriages that matched a white man with an Indian woman, and she discussed her opinion in her journal.

We soon came to a log house and two Indian lodges. Here we found Capt. Grant (Richard Grant who was in charge of Fort Hall for the Hudson's Bay Company 1842-1851). Mr. Gray knew him years ago when he was in the Hunson's Bay company. From his appearance I think he must once have been a splendid looking man. He has his second wife. His first was a native woman, a half-breed. She was a widow when he married her. It is perfectly astonishing to me how a man who has ever seen civilized people can intermarry with the natives and be contented to settle down and live as they do. His wife and two or three little girls had dresses on and looked decent, but were in an Indian lodge, and nothing about them looked decent or comfortable. There was a good many Indians around them, probably their servants. I heard the Captain speak to his wife. He spoke pleasantly, even fondly, to them. He has charge of Fort Hall but is up here to trade with the emigrants.



Figure 2. Sketch of Indian by Lodisa Frizzell.¹⁸²

None of the women fully explained her reasons for disapproval, but in general the writers had the opinion that Indian women were lazy or indolent. Helen Clark was the only emigrant woman writer who even hinted at understanding the Indian woman.

I do not wonder that squaws are so indolent for since we have have been dwellers in tents I feel that to throw myself upon the ground is luxurient ease, free from the restraints of etiquette is pleasant.¹⁸³

In their diaries and journals the women expressed more feelings of curiosity and interest in the Indians than feelings of fear or retreating. At the times when there was violence between emigrants and Indians, the women wrote more negative statements about the Indians and expressed fear, but the women did not condemn all Indians for one tribe's depredations. The women described and recognized the differences among the tribes of Indians on the trail.

MORMONS

The Mormons were a second group of people to whom most emigrants were first introduced on the trail. The women emigrants were almost as curious about Mormons as they were about the Indians.

Mormons travelled together in wagon trains and usually did not mingle with other emigrants on the trail. The women often described the Mormon travellers and Mormon towns. In 1857 Helen Carpenter described a party of Mormons whom she met on the trail.

Met a large party of Mormons going to the states. There seemed to be twice as many women as men and twice as many children as women. All were in rags and tatters and, must I say it, scabs. They were the worst lot I ever saw. All who were large enough were out of the wagons holding out rusty kettles and pans begging for milk.¹⁸⁴

Mary Fish met a train of Mormons with handcarts at Pacific Springs (Wyoming) in 1860. She wrote,

There is said to be a train of 600 hand carts on the road drawn by Mormon women four women to each cart. I think that they are badly in want of husbands when they put themselves on a level with brutes. And after all their labor to get only one third or perhaps one twentieth of a man.¹⁸⁵

Salt Lake City was on the trail for many emigrants going to California after 1847. Women emigrants to California wrote some interesting diary and journal entries about their visit to this city. Harriet Ward visited Salt Lake in 1853 and wrote, "We now came to the Mormon quarantine, where were requested to report of the health of our company." A day later she wrote,

They boast that men are all owed a plurality of wives for the purpose of raising up a perfect race to inhabit this new Jerusalem forever, but not one of them believes a word they presch, and they are a miserable lot of extortioners upon whom the wrath of God will yet be poured out.¹⁸⁶

In the next year Mary Burrel saw Mormons building a wall around the city and wrote, "They are also about constructing a wall around the city of clay, 12 foot high and 6 foot through at the base." West of the city Mary wrote, "Grain looked well, wheat in bloom. Corn looked well. Grass hard to find, it being fenced up." ¹⁸⁷

Helen Carpenter heard about a Mormon order in 1857 and described this in her journal. "September 21. Brigham Young has ordered all Mormons back to Salt Lake and they must go." ¹⁸⁸

Lucy Cooke and her family arrived in Salt Lake City in August and decided to stay there for the winter and wait until the next Spring to complete their journey to California. The family all immediately started looking for work for the winter. On her first day in the city Lucy met a Mormon man who proposed, but she declined his attentions and then wrote,

The man kept on this convincing strain as we jogged along the country road, and finally he magnanimously offered to take me, baby and all and have me sealed to him and thus have my entrance secured in the Celestial City, providing I would leave William and cling to this old scamp's skirts.¹⁸⁹

CHAPTER 2 FOOTNOTES

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- ⁹ Cooke, p. 24.
- ¹⁰ Carpenter, p. 187.
- ¹¹ Knight, p. 209.
- ¹² Belshaw, p. 17.
- ¹³ Knight, p. 210.
- ¹⁴ Jane Tourtillot, "Touring from Mitchell, Iowa to California, 1862," in Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey, ed. Lillian Schlissel (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), p. 222.
- ¹⁵ Catherine Washburn, "The Journal of Catherine Amanda Stansbury Washburn, Iowa to Oregon, 1853," typescript in Lane County Historical Society, Eugene, Oregon, p. 14.

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- ¹⁷Mrs. Francis Sawyer, "Diary, 1852," manuscript in Overland Journal Collection, The Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, June 18 entry.
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- ¹⁹Tourtillot, p. 222.
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- ²⁶Cooke. p. 28.
- ²⁷Frink, p. 37.
- ²⁸Carpenter, p. 114.
- ²⁹Reed, p. 278.
- ³⁰Washburn, p. 28.
- ³¹Helen Stewart, p. 2.
- ³²Belshaw, p. 3D.
- ³³Childbirth on the trail is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 page 114 of this paper.
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- ³⁵Ward, p. 127.
- ³⁶Lodisa Frizzell, Across the Plains to California in 1852, (New York: New York Public Library, 1915), p. 22.
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- 125Helen Stewart, p. 15.
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- 132 Ashley, p. 1.
- 133 Cooke, p. 66.
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CHAPTER 3 THE WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE ON THE TRAIL

"Just think of it--brave enough to cross the plains, but not brave enough to wear bloomers." --Mary Warner

"Those were the days that tried men's souls and bodies too, and women's constitutions; they worked the muscle on and it was there to stay."
--Keturah Belknap

"The prairie, oh the broad the beautiful, the bounding, beautiful prairie... I never saw anything as beautiful." --Rebecca Ketcham

"I then made griddle cakes, fried meat and made coffee for breakfast, washed and dressed Stella, and after we had eaten, gathered up the dishes, and packed them dirty for the first time since I started." --Charlotte Pengra

"But I was half frantic over the idea that every blade of grass for miles on each side of the road would be eaten off by the hundreds and thousands of horses, mules, and oxen ahead of us. And worse than all there would only be a few barrels of gold left for us when we got to California." --Margaret Frink

The trip to California or Oregon was a great adventure for all men, women, and children who made the journey, but the women's collective experience and the women's perception of this adventure were different from the men's. There was no standard or average woman's journey. From the preparation for the journey to the arrival in Oregon or California, the trip experience was characterized by variety and diversity among the 62 women who chronicled their journey across the continent in letters, diaries, and journals.

PREPARATION

The women's preparation ranged from detailed plans and months of preparing to a quick decision and hasty preparation made on the night before departure. The quality of the preparations for the trip was often directly related to the success and ease of the trip itself. Some travellers made little preparation and often regretted this by the second or third week on the trail. Mrs. George Donner, in the ill-fated Donner party of 1846, wrote a letter home as her party was camped at the junction of the North Platte and the South Platte Rivers. She wrote,

Our preparations for the journey, in some respects, might have been bettered. Bread has been the principal article of food in our camp. We laid in 150 pounds of flour and 75 pounds of meat for each individual, and I fear bread will be scarce.¹

Some emigrants made elaborate preparations for their trip across the plains, and these careful preparations usually resulted in more successful and comfortable trips. Keturah Belknap described the careful plans and preparations which she and her husband made during the winter prior to their journey. She wrote,

Now I will begin to work and plan to make everything with an eye to starting out on a six-month trip, the first thing is lay plans and then work up to the program so the first thing is to make a piece of linen for a wagon cover and some sacks- will spin mostly evenings while my husband reads to me... 2

The women talked most about sewing projects and food preparations, and appeared to be most responsible for these two aspects of planning and preparing for the trip. Sewing projects included making tents, wagon covers, sacks to hold provisions, and clothing for themselves and their families.

In 1838 missionary Myra Eells described the tent she "made of duck." ³ Celinda Hines spent two days sewing on her tent in Kansas City on April 6 and 7 in 1853. In the same year Rebecca Ketcham made a tent while her party was making final preparations at Westport. As soon as she finished the tent her family moved out onto the prairie and started camping in it. Rebecca wrote in her journal,

While we were at the house in Westport, we ladies had the tents and wagon-covers and numerous other articles to make. This together with overseeing the men in the cooking operations, kept us pretty busy. After we had finished the tents we moved out on the prairie. ⁴

Sewing wagon covers was another important project. Celinda Hines helped her mother and aunt make their wagon cover. At Kansas City she wrote, "Aunt L., J. and Mother and myself sewed on the wagon covers." ⁵

Keturah Belknap made a two layer wagon cover and described it in some detail in her journal. She wrote,

...will make a muslin cover for the wagon as we will have a double cover so we can keep warm and dry, put the muslin on first and then the heavy linen on for strength. They both have to be sewed real good and strong and I have to spin the thread and dew all those long seams with my fingers. then I have to make a new feather tick for my bed...the linene work is ready to go to work on and six two-bushel bags all ready to sew up...Have cut out two pairs of pants for George.⁶

Many of the women sewed bags or sacks to use for storage containers in their wagons. In 1838 Myra Eells reported that she "made some bags."

Keturah Belknap made sacks of different sizes. She wrote,

The sacks are made of home-made linen and will hold 125 pounds-four sacks of flour and one of cornmeal. Now comes the groceries-we will make a wall of smaller sacks stood on end, dried apples and peaches, beans, rice, sugar, and coffee...everything must be in strong bags, no paper wrapping for this trip.

Food supplies for the trip were usually planned and purchased by the woman and men working together. Many families waited until they reached the Missouri River to purchase the large food supplies needed to nourish the emigrants for the following four to six months. In 1853 Catherine Washburn wrote,

Arrived at Coonville this morning stopt and camped we got our outfit at this place bought five barrels of flour we have eleven-hundred weight of flour five hundred of meat three busels of aples half bushel of peeches forty pounds shugar twenty five of rice three poinds of tea six gallons of molasses one eight gallon keg full of pickles and four gals lard.⁸

Margaret Frink and her husband purchased a typical list of supplies in 1850. She wrote,

Our outfit for provisions was plenty of hams and bacon, covered with care from the dust, apples, peaches, and preserved fruits of different kinds, rice, coffee, tea, beans, flour, corn-meal, crackers, sea biscuit, butter, and lard.⁹

Dried fruits and vegetables were purchased for the trip by some emigrants. Eliza McAuley wrote, "We have a plentiful supply of provisions including dried fruits and vegetables, also a quantity of light bread cut in slices and dried for used when it is not convenient to bake."¹⁰

The guide books, other emigrants, and even the outfitting stores had advice about the food supplies needed on the journey.¹¹

The clothing for the trip was usually sewed and/or purchased by the women. In 1838 Myra Eells described a sensible wardrobe for the trail.

A lady should have a good green merino or pongee dress, and a loose calico dress to wear when she does not need her cloak. Her underclothes as well as the gentlemen's should all be colored. They ought to have three changes to wear on the journey. They should have a Florence bonnet or a variegated straw...A lady should have a pair of gentlemen's calf shoes, and be well-supplied with stockings and shoes.¹²

Helen Carpenter purchased material to sew her trail wardrobe.

She wrote, "I got two pairs of shoes, calico for two spencer waistes, jeans for a dress skirt, needles, pins and thread and so forth." ¹³

In addition to their food supplies and wardrobe, several women planned and purchased a supply of medicines to carry in their wagons. Elizabeth Geer described her medicine chest, "Laid in our flour, cheese, crackers and medicine for no one should travel this road without medicine for they are almost sure to have summer complaint. Each family should have a box of physicking pills, a quart of castor oil, a quart of the best rum and a large vial of peppermint essence." ¹⁴

While the women were sewing and preparing food items, the men were usually responsible for the purchase and preparation of the wagon and the training of the livestock. Several of the women commented on the male preparations. Keturah Belknap wrote in her journal, "Now it is March and we have our team already and in good condition--three good yoke of oxen and a good wagon. The company expect to start the tenth of April. George is practicing with the oxen." ¹⁵

The women in Celinda Hines party did not have confidence in the preparations being made by the men in their party. Celinda wrote,

The provision wagon has five yokes of oxen attached, the baggage wagon four, the light one three. The females, mother excepted, walked nearly all of the way, six miles. We were afraid to ride as the men were unaccustomed to driving oxen.¹⁶

Agnes Stewart also had reservations about riding in her wagon at the start. She wrote, "What awkward attempts some of the men make at yoking the cattle, some of them scarcely ever saw cattle before they started on this."¹⁷

Packing the wagons was the final step in preparing for the trip. Every party did this differently, and many repacked their wagons after only a couple of days on the trail. The way the wagon was loaded greatly affected the work of the women. A lot of the things had to be unloaded and loaded every day, and the women did a lot of this getting out and putting away.

In 1847 Keturah Belknap and her family packed their wagon with care. She described this in detail.

April.9.. Our wagon is backed up the the steps we will load at the hind end and shove the things in front. The first thing is a big box that will just fit in the wagon bed that will have the bacon, salt, and various other things then it will be covered with a cover made of light boards nailed on two pieces of inch plank about three inches wide this will serve us for a table there is a hole at each corner and we have sticks sharpened at one end so they will stick in the ground...now we will put in the old chest that is packed with our clothes and things we will want to wear and use on the way. The till is the medicine chest, now there is a vacant place clear across that will be large enough to set a chair--will set it with the back against the side of the wagon there I will ride on the other side will be a vacancy where little Jessie can play he has a few toys and some marbles and some sticks for whip stocks some blocks for oxen and I tie a string on the stick and he uses my work basket for a covered wagon and plays going to Oregon.

The next thing is a box as high as the chest that is packed with a few dishes and things we won't need till we get thru and now we put in the long sacks of flour and other things. The sacks are made of home-made linen and will hold 125 pounds--four sacks of flour and one of corn meal. Now comes the groceries we will make a wall of smaller sacks stood on end, dried apples and peaches, beans, rice, sugar, and coffee--the latter being in the green state, we will brown it in a skillet as we want to use it everything must be in strong bags--no paper wrapping for this trip. There is a corner left for the washtub and the lunch basket will just fit in the tub the dishes we want to use will all be in the basket...I have made four nice little table clothes so am going to live just like I was at home.¹⁸

Another part of the preparation for a trip to California or Oregon was the selection and purchase of a few sturdy and versatile cooking utensils to use for food preparation on the trail. The cooking and eating equipment which the emigrants bought and packed in their wagons varied greatly. Fancy and heavy cookstoves, light and portable tin stoves, or just campfires were the three most popular cooking methods on the trail.

FOOD AND DRINK

The diet of the emigrants on the trail affected their health, strength, and comfort on the trail. For some emigrants the food they ate and beverages they drank on the trail may have made the difference between success and disaster. Some made elaborate preparations for the trip and prepared or purchased dried fruits, vegetables, smoked hams and bacon, canned pickles and fruit, and purchased staples such as flour, sugar, tea, rice, and coffee at the jumping-off places. Other just purchased staples and hoped to get by.

Different arrangements were made to supply fresh meat and milk on the trail. Some emigrants took along milk cows to provide fresh milk and butter every day while others drank only coffee or tea on the trail. Some took along cattle and sheep to butcher and provide fresh meat enroute. A few wagon trains employed hunters to go along and kill game to provide the emigrants with fresh meat. Many of the emigrants hunted for game and fished in streams and rivers, but hunting and fishing were not always dependable sources of food.

The women were often the cooks so the responsibility for menu planning and food preparation often rested on the women's shoulders. Their culinary skills affected the quality of life on the trail for their family.

In a few parties the family hired a cook. Harriet Griswold and Lucy Cooke supervised food preparation on the trail, but they cooked only when they wanted to prepare something special. Harriet wrote, "We have a boy to cook for our mess." 19

Lucy said, "Thomas and another young fellow do our cooking. We have two little sheet-iron stoves." 20

On most of their journey to Oregon, the missionary women in 1836 and 1838 did not do the cooking. Sarah Smith wrote, "Here I will remark that most all the cooking is done by the gentlemen." 21 Sarah did some cooking after they arrived at the rendezvous and quit travelling with the fur company. The missionaries were travelling light and fast so she did not have all the equipment she needed for cooking and she had to invent. She wrote,

Spent the morning sewing on the hunter's dress and this afternoon made a couple of pies, chopped the meat with a butcher knife on the back of a cottonwood tree which Mr. S. peeled off. Rolled the crust with a crooked stick in a hollow bark, baked them in the tin baker out of doors in the wind but they were good and we have a good supper. 22

The same Mr. Gray who went with the missionary party in 1838 was also the leader of another wagon train in 1853, and he did a lot of the cooking on both trips. Rebecca Ketcham had paid Mr. Gray to make all arrangements and deliver her to Oregon, but she was not happy with the way he cooked her food nor with the food itself. She wrote,

For supper they made some crullers. All the biscuit has to be made made with water. The crullers were made in the same way with the addition of a little sugar. All the shortening we have is bacon gravy. As there was a pretty good quantity of this gravy on hand they made some crullers and fried them in it...We had enough left for breakfast with some rice and beans and some stewed apples. We had supper and dinner together, and had graham flour pancakes. They were made pretty thick and baked in a frying pan. Mr. Gray does most of the cooking, and it is amusing to see some of his operations. I believe he generally makes out to wash his hands before he commences, but I must say I think there is some dirt in our food. 23

Two women were amused by the cooking methods employed by other members

of their wagon trains and described these at length in their diaries. Helen Carpenter described the cooperative cooking efforts of the Farmer family.

Living as we do, I suppose it is permissible to note what the neighbors do and how they do it. The old gentleman Farmer is very good to help 'mother' in the culinary arrangements. He makes the fires, gets out the pots and kettles and the eatables and helps generally while 'mother' makes the bread and coffee. 'Sister' is too small to do more than be in the way. Then the four sons and men are ready for a meal each for the time being becomes his own cook so there is no occasion for anyone to grumble. Willows are sharpened and slices of bacon speared and held in the fire ad lib. It looks quite amusing.²⁴

Sarah Herndon tried to help her neighbors who had left behind their servants and were trying to learn to cook. She wrote,

When we started on this trip not one member of the family had ever prepared an entire meal; they had always had a houseful of servants to cook and do everything else for them. The first two or three weeks Neelie and her mother tried to learn to cook, and mother and I to teach them. It takes great patience to learn to bake in stoves out of doors, they heat red-hot so quickly, and cool just as suddenly; they must have careful attention all the time...Neelie does the cooking with some assistance from her father such as getting wood, making fires, bringing water, grinding the coffee, etc...It is no small undertaking to cook for a family of twelve.²⁵

Often the men and women shared the responsibilities for cooking. Sarah Sutton usually helped the other women, but the men did the cooking under adverse conditions. Sarah wrote about the men cooking during a storm, "It is storming so the women can't come out and the men have had a great time getting breakfast and was good enough to bring us some to the wagon."²⁶

Cooking over campfires and using sheet-iron cooking stoves were the two most frequently used cooking methods mentioned in the women's diaries, letters, and journals. Sallie Hester, Eliza McAuley, and Sarah Herndon all use sheet-iron stoves. Eliza wrote about her family's cooking arrangements.

We have two saddle horses and a drove of 20 dairy cows, a good sized tent and a sheet-iron camp stove which can be set up inside making it warm and comfortable, no matter what the weather outside. We have a plentiful supply of provisions, including dried fruits and vegetables, also a quantity of light bread cut in slices and dried for use when it is not convenient to bake. Our stove is furnished with a reflector oven which bakes very nicely.²⁷

Sallie Hester wrote a good description of her family's cooking arrangements on the trail.

We. have a cooking stove made of sheet iron, a portable table, tin plates and cups, cheap knives and forks, camp stools etc. We sleep in our wagons on feather beds; the men who drive for us in the tent. We live on bacon, ham, rice, tea, and milk as we have our own cows.²⁸

In contrast to Sallie who had a stove, table, stools, and plates, cups, knives, forks, and who slept in a wagon on a feather bed, Narcissa Whitman was travelling very light on horseback. Narcissa ate on the ground, had only a few utensils, and slept in a tent. Narcissa wrote,

Our table is the ground, our table-cloth is an Indian rubber cloth used when it rains as a cloak; our dishes are made of tin, basins for tea cups, iron spoons and plates for each of us and several pans for milk and to put our meat in when we wish to set it upon the table- each one carries his own knife in his scabbard: and it is always ready for use.²⁹

Cooking over an open fire was another option which was used by emigrants who were trying to travel both light and fast. Esther Lyman wrote a detailed description of how to build a fire on the ground. Her family abandoned their cook stove in an effort to lighten their load. She wrote,

I might as well tell you here how we manage to build our fires since we left the stove. We dig a trench about six inches in depth one foot in width and between three and four feet in length. We lay small bars of iron across the trench after the fire is kindled, then it is ready for use. The worst trouble is in not having anything to bake in. Joseph found a bake kettle but it did not have any cover, but we can borrow one sometimes.³⁰

Finding fuel for the cooking fires was often a problem. Wood was preferred if it was dry and if it was available. When wood was not handy emigrants resorted to building their fires with buffalo chips, coal, or sage. The women usually were not happy about cooking over buffalo chips. Mary Dutro wrote, "We have used buffalo chips for cooking they do fine on the windy plain where you can't keep the ashes out of your vittles, for my part I prefer wood ashes."³¹

Patty Sessions called this fuel buffalo dung. "Bake mince pies, bread, and meat over buffalo dung."³²

Harriet Griswold wrote that the buffalo chips made a good hot fire. "Wood being scarce cooked with fire made of buffalo chips which make a very hot fire."³³

Mary Walker reported building her cook fire with coal. "...used prairie coal for cooking."³⁴

Harriet Griswold also used sage for fuel. "Found willows but our principle fuel has been the wild sage."³⁵

In spite of all of the problems, most women adapted very well to cooking on the trail. Esther Hanna found out she could bake bread in a skillet over a campfire. She wrote, "I am baking my first light bread on the prairie in a skillet, get along cooking out better than I expected."³⁶

The quality of the emigrant's diets depended upon what the emigrants had brought with them, on how well they hunted and fished, and on how much money they had to spend on buying food from the Indians, at the Forts and trading posts along the trail. Harriet Griswold and her family purchased the usual supplies at the beginning of the trail. She wrote, "We have laid in our stores sufficient for five months if we should need them so long, they consist of flour, bacon, hams, dried fruit, beans, potatoes, corn, coffee, tea, pickles, and a few eggs."³⁷

From supplies like these emigrants made a variety of things. They baked bread, ginger bread, biscuits, crackers, pies, corn bread, and fruit cakes. Vegetable dishes eaten on the trail included baked, boiled, or fried beans, potatoes, and rice. There was a real shortage of vegetables, especially fresh vegetables in many trail diets.

Apples were the most popular fruit taken along on the trail. Apples and other fruits were stewed, put into fruit cakes and pies.

Ham and bacon were the most frequently consumed meats on the trail. Game killed along the trail, cattle slaughtered enroute, and fish caught in streams and rivers provided a little variety for some emigrants.

Cooking was only a job to do for some women on the trail, but a few of the women made real efforts to prepare nutritious and delicious food for their parties. Two women in particular recorded many details of the cooking endeavors and recorded interesting accounts of their efforts in their journals.

Charlotte Pengra prepared a good variety of foods and fed her family a well-balanced diet. She frequently mentions cooking in her writing.

I baked cracker pudding, warm biscuits, and made tea, and after supper stewed two pans of dried apples and made two loaves of bread, got my work done up, beds made and child asleep and have written in my journal.³⁸

... baked this morning and stewed apples this afternoon commenced washing got my white clothes ready to suds..."³⁹

"Up very early took a cold breakfast of beans, bread, and butter and tea washed up the dishes packed the waggon..."⁴⁰

... have baked a large quantity of biscuit, stewed apples and beans, got supper, washed the dishes, made the bed and other things..."⁴¹

... since stopping stewed a pan of apples, a boiler of rice and baked a large pan full of flour into biscuits.⁴²

Mary Burrel listed in her diary the foods she prepared on the trail.

Mary was a girl of 19 cooking with her mother on the trip. She was unmarried, but her 'future' husband was travelling with the wagon train. Mary wrote,

Stewed apples, fried cakes, baked cakes and bread.
We washed and made two fruit cakes; had mush and milk for supper.
We washed and boiled ham; good feed.
Made fruit cakes, washed...
Spent the rest of the day in washing and baking pies and bread.
Washed, baked gingersnaps.⁴³

The other women mention food occasionally in their diaries and journals, often on occasions when they cooked special things. Keturah Belknap cooked two special dishes and wrote, "Skillet of corn bread and mince pies."⁴⁴

Mary Walker baked special dishes after she left the rendezvous. She wrote, "Baked some bread and assisted Mrs. Gray in making a pot pies." Another day she, "Baked pudding, sewed on a hunting dress."⁴⁶

In the same party Sarah Smith described a popular trail meal. "Have taken our supper of fried ham, bread and a cup of tea. We are happy; find our little tent very comfortable."⁴⁷

Kate Dunlap and Cecelia Adams did the cooking for several meals at the same time whenever they stopped long enough. Some evenings when they stopped late or when the weather was bad there was no opportunity to cook. Kate wrote, "I have been cooking beans and stewing fruit and baking bread."⁴⁸

Cecelia cooked a large quantity of food one day when the wagon train did not travel. She wrote, "I baked bread and pumpkin and apple pies, cooked beans and meat, stewed apples, and baked suckeyes in quantity sufficient to last some, besides making Dutch cheese, and took everything out of the wagon to air."⁴⁹

Food and cooking were a major concern of most of the women who wrote diaries and journals in the trail. If they were not actively cooking, the women commented on the food from the viewpoint of consumers. In addition to mention of the food itself, the women described cooking methods and recipes. Some women wrote down recipes in their diaries and journals. Narcissa Whitman told how to make mountain bread,

... were hospitably entertained by Captain Thing who keeps the Fort. (Fort Hall) Our dinner consisted of dry buffalo meat, turnips and fried bread, which was a luxury. Mountain bread is simply coarse flour and water mixed and roasted or fried in

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buffalo grease...for tea we had the same with the addition of
some stewed service berries." 50

Mary Fish wrote down several recipes in the back of her diary. She recorded the recipes for sponge cake, jelly cake, green corn pudding, sugar crackers, apple custard, old English plum pudding, white hand soap, bride cake, and crackers.

Coffee, tea, and milk were the common beverages on the trail; but milk was a special treat only available when the emigrants took along a milk cow. Leading and/or herding a milk cow along the trail could slow down a party who wanted to travel fast, so only some of the emigrants had milk cows with them. Narcissa Whitman recognized the value of milk on the trail. She wrote, "We milk four cows...We have tea and a plenty of milk which is a luxury in this country. Our milk has assisted us very much in making our bread since we have been journeying." 51

Some parties milked cows all the way to Oregon or California. Elizabeth Porters' group took along milk cows. She wrote, "Cattle all doing fine, give lots of milk." 52

Taking along milk cows caused emigrants many different problems on the trail. When the emigrants found poor grass for several day and travelled across the deserts, the milk cows often dried up. Helen Carpenter was disappointed when her cow's milk failed, and she wrote, "There has been such poor feed that Sookeys' (the family' milk cow) milk is failing. Woe is me when it gives out." 53

Eating sage and weeds along the trail often flavored the milk of the cows, and many women reported that even the alkali in the soil affected the taste of the milk. Elizabeth Wood experienced this and wrote, "The water is so bad here and the milk from our cows so strongly impregnated with alkali, that I have substituted coffee as a beverage." 54

Often the women milked the cows on the trail, but Helen Carpenter said that only the women from Missouri had to milk. Yankee husbands did the milking, she wrote.

In respect to the women's work, the days are all very much the same except when we stop for a day. Then there is washing to be done and light bread to make and all kinds of odd jobs. Some women have very little help about the camp being obliged to get the wood and water, make camp fires, unpack at night and pack up in the morning, and if they are Missourians they have the milking to do if they are fortunate enough to have cows. I am lucky in having a Yankee for a husband so am well waited on.⁵⁵

In addition to milk, the cows also provided butter. On the trail most emigrants made their butter the same way. Keturah Belknap described the milk handling and butter-making on the trail. She wrote,

We have three good milch cows milk them at night and strain the milk in little buckets and cover them up and set on ground under the wagon and in the morning I take off the nice thick cream and put it in the churn. I save the stripping from each cow in the morning milking and put it in the churn also and after riding all day I have a nice roll of butter as long as we have plenty of grass and water.⁵⁶

Helen Carpenter and Eliza McAuley described using tin churns to make butter. Helen hung her can from the wagon bows and Eliza set hers in the back of the wagon. The motion of the wagon churned the butter. Helen wrote, "The milk is carried in a can swung to the wagon bows overhead. By noon (if the churn works well and it seldom fails) there is a ball of butter the size of a hickory nut and innumerable little ones like shot."⁵⁷

Eliza wrote, "We have a tin churn in which the morning's milk is put and and by noon or evening we have a nice little pat of butter and some good buttermilk."⁵⁸

Good water was an important commodity on the trail, and the water from some rivers and streams was better for drinking purposes than the water from others. Emigrants were very aware of the quality of the drink water. If the water was muddy, the emigrants settled out the mud by adding alum. Mrs. Hadley described how she improved the dirty water of the Platte

River. "The water of the Platte is very good, when settled which we do by throwing in a little alum and let it stand awhile."⁵⁹

Esther Lyman used corn meal to settle out the mud in the water from the Platte. She wrote,

The waters of the Platte is saturated with moist earthy limestone and sand and has a torpid appearance. Before using it for drinking or cooking it should be settled by sprinkling a handful of corn meal slowly into a pail and stirring it at the same time. It will soon become quite clear, palatable, and wholesome.⁵⁰

Coffee and tea somewhat masked the bad taste of the river water, and these two beverages were used by most emigrants (except the Mormons). If they ran out of coffee they used a variety of substitutes. Some made ginger or barley tea. Patty Sessions, a Mormon, drank ginger tea. She wrote, "Drank sweetened ginger and water."⁶¹

Helen Stewart made ginger tea and coffee to warm-up the men who had to swim cattle across a river. She wrote, "The men is all very tired we are too fore we had to run and put blankets round them all whenever they came out of the water and drench them all with ginger tea and boiling coffee."⁶²

Harriet Griswold substituted barley when she ran out of coffee. She wrote, "Have got out of coffee and use barley as a substitute."⁶³

On the trail the emigrants supplemented the supplies which they brought with them by hunting and fishing for fresh meat and gathering berries along the way. Prairie or sage hens, plover, ducks, and geese were some of the fowl they hunted and ate long the trail.

Mary Burrel, Marie Norton, Mrs. Sawyer, and Sarah Sutton cooked and ate sage hens or prairie chickens. Mary said, "Had a prairie hen for supper."⁶⁴

Marie wrote, "Boys killed some sage hens and rabbits, which we are are going to have for supper."⁶⁵

Mrs. Sawyer like the sage hens. "Mr. Sawyer went off the road this morning on his pony and killed two sage hens. We ate them for dinner, and they were delicious."⁶⁶

Sarah described a feast that included sage hens and rabbits.

The boys have killed about 18 rabbits and five sage hens this forenoon, the girls are washing and baking apple and peach pies, stewing beans and rabbits and appear very happy are all in good health and know no trouble, we have only eight girls to do the work; this trip is fun for them.⁶⁷

Mrs. Hadley complained about the taste of the sage hens she ate on the trail. She wrote,

See' some hens called sage hens, I have heard say they were good to to eat. Some of the company killed some, and I think a skunk preferable. Their meat tastes of this abominable mountain sage which I have got so tired of that I can't bear to smell it; they live wholly upon it and it scents their flesh.⁶⁸

Lodisa Frizzell enjoyed a supper of plover or upland sandpipers.

She wrote, "Lloyd killed ten plovers with two shots of his double barrel shotgun, which we dressed and had a fine supper."⁶⁹

Antelope and buffalo meat were usually at least sampled on the trail. Some of the men shot an antelope and a buffalo as they crossed the plains, but a few emigrants bought the meat from other emigrants or from indians. Most of the women reported that they liked fresh antelope meat. Mary Warner traded for some and liked its taste. "May 18. Soon came some Indians with fresh antelope. They sold us some, or rather we traded flour. It was so new and good for our supper, tasted something like young lamb."⁷⁰

Mrs. Hadley's company killed an antelope and divided the meat among all the members of the company. "One of our company killed an antelope and gave us some. It is very sweet and tender, a good deal like veal, much better than venison."⁷¹

Sarah Herndon called it feast when she had antelope. She wrote.

"We have been feasting on antelope." 72

The plains were also famous for providing buffalo herds. Emigrants killed buffalo for both sport and meat. In her letter Virginia Reed, who travelled with the Donner party, wrote that her father killed several buffalo, "Paw goes buffalo hunting every day and kills tw or three buffalo every day." 73

Narcissa Whitman liked the buffalo meat which her husband cooked. She wrote, "The hunter brought us buffalo meat yesterday...Husband is cooking it, no one of our company professes the art but himself." 74

Lodisa Frizzell cooked the bones as well as the meat. She wrote, "We made some soup from the marrow bone of our fresh meat (buffalo) which I think an epicure would have called good, and eating this with boiled rice helped us very much." 75

Mrs. Hadley believed that it was good to eat fresh meat shot along the trail, but three men in her train carried their hunting and eating activities too far. She wrote, "We have three English men in our train who eat everything. Have a kettle of soup every day. One day they had black bird soup." 76

Fish from the rivers and streams along the trail were another source of fresh meat and added variety to the emigrant's diets. Women, men, and children all went fishing along the trail. 77 Fish were always a welcome change from the usual trail fare. Charlotte Pengra looked forward to eating fish. She wrote, "...the men have been fishing, have caught two good sized fish and have set their hooks for more, we anticipate a rich treat in the morning." 78

Fresh fruits and vegetables were not common ingredients in the diets of people travelling westward. Picking berries along the trail was a common activity, and fresh berries were a welcome change and a real treat. Goose berries, service berries, currants, strawberries, hawthorns were

picked and eaten fresh or made into dumplings, pies, and puddings. Lucy Cooke picked gooseberries and made pies. She wrote, "William and I amuse ourselves picking gooseberries...I made two pies of them and gave one to Ma. I had to roll my piecrust on the wagon seat; rather primitive style, you'll think, but it seemed good to do even that bit of cooking."79

Mary Burrel picked service berries and made a dumpling. She wrote, "...having about three pints of service berries picked for a dumpling which went well."80

Narcissa Whitman was very interested in all the plants she found along the trail, and she described the service berries she picked and ate. "Had a feast of service berries today, the first ripe ones we have seen. They are a small black berry, very sweet, something like the pear in its flavor. Stopped and gathered some which rested me much."81

Mary Burrel made currant pudding. She wrote, "Had another pudding made of wild currants."82

Esther Hanna found red, yellow, and black currants. She wrote,

The wild currant grows here in greatest abundance, red, yellow, and black, the Indians call them KaKapes, they are delicious. They grow on stems like our currants and about the size or perhaps a little larger, but in shape and size they are more like our gooseberry. The bush is very much the same as what we call mountain currant in the States--an ornamental shrub with yellow blossoms. Our company has gathered several quarts of them which is quite a luxury after being deprived of fruit for so long a time...(later) Feasted this evening on trout and stewed currants.83

Narcissa picked hawthorn berries on the Snake River and wrote, "This evening found a plenty of berries called hawthorn on the stream where we camped. They are as large as a cherry and taste much like a mealy sweet apple."84

Along the trail the emigrants gathered other natural resources to use in cooking. Salt, salartus, and soda water were collected and used.

Mary Walker collected salt for seasoning. She wrote, "Encamped at noon on Thomas Fork. Collected a supply of salt."⁸⁵

Lodisa Frizzell and others gathered some saleratus or baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) and made bread with it. She did not like the taste. "We passed an alkali pond this morning and gathered up a panful of the salaratus which looks like frozen snow, forming a crust around the edge of the water; I tried some of in in some bread; it made it quite light, but gave it a bitter taste."⁸⁶

Most emigrants were interested in the water in the Soda Springs, and collected samples of the water. Rebecca Ketcham liked the biscuits made with this water. "Camilla made some biscuits with the water, put nothing in but the water, flour, and a little salt. They were quite light and good."⁸⁷

Sarah Smith also thought the water made good biscuits. She wrote,

The water tastes like soda water, especially artificially prepared. We find it excellent for making bread, no preparation of the water is necessary, take it from the fountain and the bread is light as any prepared with yeast.⁸⁸

Esther Hanna made a soda drink with water from the Soda Spring.

She wrote,

There are some nine or ten of these springs in this place. The water is clear and sparkling, boiling and bubbling swelling at times almost to the surface; it is strongly impregnated with soda and by putting a little acid in it and adding sugar it will compare with any soda as it foams and boils up in the same way. It will also raise biscuit equal to saleratus...we mixed up a drink with tartaric acid and sugar which was excellent and foamed nicely.⁸⁹

Mrs. Sawyer also made soda drinks at these springs.

July 4. We arrived at the noted Soda Springs this afternoon. Stopped and went out to see them. I made some soda drinks and cream tartar with the water and they were very nice and cool...⁹⁰

The planning, purchasing, and preparing of the food which would nourish and sustain the emigrants for the next four to six months on the trail were important tasks. The diets of the emigrants would affect the health of the travellers, and good health on the trail was very important to the success or failure of the journey. Illness, disease, and accidents struck down some of the emigrants. It was important that the emigrants do everything possible to reduce the chances of illness and to reduce all risks.

Any illness encountered on the trail was frightening because medicines and doctors were not always available and because wagon trains often could not stop long for illness. The emigrant wagon trains were under constant pressure to keep moving. They ran out of grass for their livestock if they camped several days in one place.

Medical help was often available when emigrants became ill or had accidents on the trail. Doctors often travelled with the emigrants, and they practiced their profession as they travelled often serving all the wagon trains within one or two days of them. Two of the women journalists on the trail in 1852 were the wives of doctors. Mary Stuart Bailey's husband Dr. Fred Bailey visited patients as he travelled to California. Cecelia Adams husband was Dr. William Adams, and he called on ill people in other trains on his way to Oregon.

In 1847 Patty Sessions was mid-wife for the Mormon wagon train going to Salt Lake City. She kept a diary on her trip in which she officially recorded all of the births she attended. She delivered 14 babies on her trip from Omaha, Mormon winter quarters, to Salt Lake City. Patty's diary entries do not give much description of a birth on the trail. One typical entry reads, "Put sister Shaw to bed she a daughter born 9 am."⁹¹

Velina Williams and Charlotte Pengra provided health care services for others on the trail in 1853. Veline wrote about helping a friend, "Mrs. Dugan very sick all night; myself doctor and nurse. Up most of night. Mrs. D. much better." 92

Charlotte helped several people, and she described many of her remedies in her journal. "Mrs. Fordhams little girl is quite sick, has a high fever, I have assisted in packing her, hope we can relieve her before long." 93

Charlotte described other illnesses on the trail,

... had a call to visit a lady suffering with cramp colic, went with two or three others, found her very sick, indeed for sometime I thought her case almost hopeless but after applying numerous remedies we succeeded in relieving her, and left about nine in the evening for our tents. 94

(I) was packed in the morning Kept wet bandages and took plenty of cold ingestion through the day, at night took a sits bath felt considerably better...they made a good bed in the waggon gave me a dose of Opium and travelled 22 miles I was better at night. 95

Pregnancy and toothache were the most mentioned health problems among the women journal writers. Many of the young married women had to deal with pregnancy and childbirth while they travelled to Oregon and California. One of the first women to travel the trail in 1836 became pregnant on the journey. Narcissa Whitman gave birth to a daughter on March 14, 1837 about six and one-half months after her arrival at Fort Walla Walla. She does not mention her pregnancy in her trail journal or letters.

Two of the women in the second party of women to travel the trail were pregnant. Mrs. Gray had a son on March 20, 1839 a little less than seven months after her arrival at the Whitman Station, but she did not write a diary. Mary Walker mentioned her pregnancy in her journal when she felt the baby move for the first time. She wrote, "July 15 Felt for the first time

the leaping of (the fetus)."⁹⁶ Nine days later Mary was thrown off her horse but was not injured. She wrote, "Nooned at cold spring, camped at the Soda (Springs) My horse fell and tumbled me over his head, did not hurt me."⁹⁷

Mary gave birth to a boy on Friday, December 7, 1838, about three months after her arrival at the Mission in Washington. Mary's journal, which she continued to write even after arriving, recorded the birth of her son and the problems she experienced for the three weeks following it.

Friday, December 7, 1838. Awoke about five o'clock a.m. As soon as I moved was surprised by a discharge which I supposed indicated approaching confinement. Felt unwilling it should happen in the absence of my husband. I waited a few moments. Soon pains began to come on and I sent Mrs. who lodged with me to call Mrs. Whitman. She came and called her husband. They made what preparations they deemed necessary, left me to attend worship and breakfast. After which at almost nine I became quite sick enough began to feel discouraged. Felt as if I almost wished I had never been married. But there was no retreating, meet it I must. About eleven I began to be quite discouraged. I had hoped to be delivered ere then...But just as I supposed the worst was at hand, my ears were saluted with the cry of my child. A son was the salutation. Soon I forgot my misery in the joy of possessing a proper child. I truly felt to say with Eve, I have gotten a man from the Lord. With Hannah for this child I prayed. Thanks to a kind Providence for so great and unmerited a blessing. The remainder of the day I (was) comfortable. Husband returned in the evening with a thankful heart, I trust, and plenty of kisses for me and my boy. Mrs. Smith stayed with me thru the night, her husband being gone from home...

Monday December 10, 1838 Up for the first time. Mrs. Smith took my washing.

Tuesday, December 11. Nipples very sore. Worry with my babe. Get all tired out.

Wednesday December 12. Mrs. Eells takes care of me. Very nervous. Milk so caked in my breasts, have apprehensions of two broken breasts. Have it steamed and drawed alternately till it seems better, then cover.

Monday December 17. Felt quite out of sorts this morning because they did not bring me plenty to eat. Was very faint for want of food. At breakfast took hold of horse meat with a pretty good relish. Through the day have been well-supplied. Tonight felt had been ungrateful to murmur. My breast still a cause of much suffering. Sat up and tended my babe about half the day. Took a nap. This evening made a cap for my babe, the first time I have sewed any. Fear I have worked too hard today.

Tuesday December 18. Very sick all day. Steam pads over my breasts all day.. Have taken cold. Experience soreness in all my breasts, relieved by sweating. Take morphine and calomel. Go to bed, sleep some.

116

Monday December 31. Have obtained a (mare's) feat). Hope to succeed in using it. If so I shall rejoice.⁹⁸

Mary Walker was the only one of the 63 women who described in her journal her own experience of giving birth in the wilderness. Other women mention childbirth on the trail.

Amelia Knight mentioned the birth of her eighth child in 1853 as she travelled along the Columbia River, but she does not give many details.

A few days later my eighth child was born. After this we picked up and ferried across the Columbia River, utilizing skiff, canoes, and flatboat to get across, taking three days to complete. Here husband traded two yoke of oxen for a half section of land with one-half acre planted to potatoes and a small log cabin and lean-to with no windows. This is the journey's end.⁹⁹

Amelia found her trip to Oregon difficult. She was certainly not travelling under optimum conditions. On her journey she was in her last months of pregnancy, and she was more or less responsible for her seven children on the trail. On the other hand pregnancy was nothing new to her.

In 1853 Esther Lyman became ill with a fever and lost a baby on the trail, and she mentions this in a journal entry. She wrote,

I was taken with the same fever...it was six weeks before I was able to be even taken out of the buggy...on the 21st of August I lost my babe, it only lived a few hours. I should not have mentioned this only I wanted to tell you one particular about it. It was a daughter, however that was nothing strange, but if you had seen it you would have thought it ought to have belonged to Mary instead of me. It had five fingers on each hand and one was exactly like, Marys, her worst one. Otherwise it was perfect child...in the course of a week I began to recover.¹⁰⁰

Childbirth on the road to Oregon or California was not an unusual thing, and many of the women mention the birth of a child to someone in their wagon train or in a train travelling near them. Mary Walker mentioned the birth of a daughter to the Indian wife of one of the fur traders in her caravan. Mary noted that this woman rode horseback all day long on the day before she gave birth. Mary wrote,

Conner's squaw about to give birth...The woman safe in camp. Think it is a hard case in such circumstances to ride some 12 miles uphill and down...Conner's wife was confined. At noon she collected fuel and prepared dinner. Gave birth to a daughter before sunset.¹⁰¹

Along the Sweetwater in August Mrs. Sawyer visited a woman who gave birth on the trail. Mrs. Sawyer wrote,

I saw a lady where we nooned today, who had a fine son three days old. The arrival of the little stranger had made it necessary for his friends to go into camp for a week or more, and they had settled down to make themselves at home, quietly and patiently awaiting the time that they might resume their march. The lady was comfortably situated and in good spirits. I have heard of several children being born on the plains, though it is not a very pleasant place for the little fellows to first see the light of day.¹⁰²

In her journal Celinda Hines mentions the birth of a boy in her wagon train. "We returned to camp and found we had an addition to our company in a little boy named Labonte Judson." The child had been named for the creek, Labonte Creek, near his birthplace.¹⁰³

Harriet Ward became acquainted with a couple who had a baby born at Pyramid Circle. The parents named their son after his birthplace, Harriet wrote.

August 25. During our stay this morn, Frank and myself called upon our friends whom we met a week since, and found the babe whose birthplace was Pyramid Circle doing finely. The mother improving, but has been quite sick. The boy, poor little fellow, must hereafter answer to the unpoetical conomen of Pyramid Alonzo.¹⁰⁴

A two and one-half week old baby died on the trail in Maria Belshaw's train in 1853. She wrote, "Mrs. George Belshaw gave birth to a daughter at 4 o'clock this morning.(September 20)." On October 6th Maria wrote, "Came but a short distance on account of George Belshaw losing his infant daughter. She died at 9 am of cancer of the stomach." ¹⁰⁵

On the trail in 1853 Charlotte Pengra was often called to help sick people. She rode back two miles to assist a woman giving birth, but the

baby arrived before Charlotte did. She wrote,

May 19. This evening word came to the camp that a lady encamped some two miles back was sick and needed aid. Accordingly Allison and I hunted up our husbands, got them to saddle two horses and started--had a very pleasant ride, found the lady quite comfortable in bed in a waggon with a little daughter--perhaps an hour old. Gave it a name (Sarah Emily Bondfield), wished her success and rode back--reached our camp about dark, well pleased with our expedition.¹⁰⁶

Jane Tourtillot witnessed several tragedies along the trail in 1862.

One accident involved a pregnant woman who was run over by a wagon and cattle in a stampede. Jane wrote,

July 28. We passed by the train I have just spoken of. They had just buried the babe of the woman who died days ago and were just digging a grave for another woman that was run over by the cattle and wagons when they stampeded yesterday. She lived twenty-four hours and she gave birth to a child a short time before she died. The child was buried with her.¹⁰⁷

Travelling in 1864 Elizabeth Porter recorded three births on the trail, including twins. Elizabeth wrote, "One woman in our train had twin babies last night."¹⁰⁸ August 13th she wrote, "Mrs. Stamper had a baby this morning, she is very sick. Baby dead and buried...Mrs. Stamper better in the afternoon."¹⁰⁹

After pregnancy, toothaches ranked second as a health concern among the women journalists and the women they described in their journals, diaries, and letters. Sometimes the women only mention pain and illness, and it requires a careful search of the journal or diary to find a cause.

Mary Walker who was pregnant suffered from a toothache for several days on her journey to Oregon in 1838. She mentions pain and illness, but finally wrote that she felt well after she had her tooth extracted. She wrote, "Left camp at half past four in the morning after a sleepless night with toothache. Tho I laid nearly all day, I could not get even a nap, so unwell I concluded to have it extracted after which I felt better."¹¹⁰

Mormon midwife Patty Sessions suffered from a toothache during her journey to Salt Lake City in 1847. She wrote, "I have got the tooth-ache bad...I feel bad--me face swelled bad--can hardly set up--it's quite hard on me to drive the team all the way." 111

Fifty-year old Harriet Ward experienced excellent health on her journey to California in 1853, but she did have a toothache several times. Harriet wrote, "Frank and myself passed an unpleasant night attending to my poor old tooth which ached unmercifully." 112

Maria Norton also suffered from a toothache while she journeyed to California in 1859. She noted, "Have been having the toothache today..." 113

According to the women writers, they did not fear illness on the trail any more they feared illness when they were at home. Many of them, however, believed in being prepared. Vaccinations were sometimes taken before leaving home as a preventative measure, and many women packed a medicine chest to take in their wagons. Only two women mentioned these vaccinations in their journals, but it is likely that a lot of people took them before leaving home.

Lucy Cooke had her baby vaccinated for something in 1852. She wrote, "My dear babe was vaccinated from Richard W. It was only done in one place, but it has 'taken' nicely, so I'm glad only one scar is made." 114

In a letter Mary Gray wrote that her husband was vaccinated. "My husband has a very lame arm today, occasioned by vaccination..." 115

The medicine chests taken on the trail contained a variety of cures. Some of the women had favorite remedies which they recommended in their journals and diaries. Elizabeth Geer recommended a whole supply of medicines to take. "Laid in our...medicine for no one should travel this road without medicine...each family should have a box of physicking pills, a quart of castor oil, a quart of the best rum, and a large vial of

peppermint essence." 116

In their journals and diaries the women give a glimpse of the medical professions state of the art in the mid 1800's. Seidlitz Powder, Golden Seal Lobelia, and Calomel were cures that were mentioned several times by the women. Mary Fish wrote the recipe for a cure for diptheria in her journal. She wrote,

Diptheria Cure

Golden Seal 1 drachma

1 drachma

Black pepper 1 drachma

Nitrate of potash 1 drachma

Salt 1 drachma

Put all into half a _____ cupful of boiling water, stir it well.

Swab the throat every half hour when the patient gets better

every two hours. Rub the following ointment outside the throat:

_____, ammonia 1 ounce, turpentine one ounce, sweet oil

1 ounce. 117

Harriet Ward gave Seidlitz Powders to an ill friend on the road to California. "This eve I opened dear Mrs. Simmons' box of Seidlitz Powders for a young friend who was ill and who thought she received much benefit from them."¹¹⁸ Harriet also used calmomel and an opiate as cures on the trail.¹¹⁹

Mary Burrel gave her mother Lobelia for a cure. She wrote, "Mother is taken sick...She is not better; got some medicine of a company, a box of Lobelia, gave her three doses." 120

Several diseases threatened emigrants on the trail, but cholera was the big threat in some years. This disease killed its victims quickly, and there were few successful remedies. Men, women, and children were stricken by this killer and buried along the trail. Cholera also killed people in cities so it was not just a hazard to travellers on the trail.

Fevers were another illness that afflicted people on the trail. Most fevers caused a lot of distress, but the women who were afflicted with fevers usually recovered.

Travel was considered to be healthful even beneficial to the health

of travellers. The added physical activity, the walking, and even the fresh air seemed to benefit a lot of women, and in their journals they gave testimonies to their improved physical conditions.

Sarah Smith, Elizabeth Geer, and Harriet Ward were positive that their health was greatly improved by their journey. Nearing her destination Sarah wrote, "Was not near as tired as I used to be at home. Think the journey has increased my strength much." 121

Elizabeth Geer, who was about 38 years old when she crossed the plains, found her health improved and her body stronger after her journey. In a letter she wrote, "I was in good health and never so nimble since I was a child. I could run a half a mile without stopping to breathe." 122

The rigors of her trip to California in 1853 restored Harriet Ward's health and greatly improved her physical condition. She joyfully records her physical improvement throughout her journal. In Missouri she expresses hope for improvement, "I shall soon think I can bear the winds and the rains as well as the youngest of our part." 123 About three weeks later she wrote, "My lame limb which had been troubling me very much indeed, had received much benefit from the wet bath (a soaking in a storm)." 124 A week later she wrote, Mrs. Quigley, Mrs. Palmer, Frank (her daughter), and myself took a long pleasant walk, and I presume during the day I walked some four or five miles and experienced no inconvenience from it." 125 Nine days later she wrote, "I find I can walk three or four miles without fatigue and Father and I both can read without spectacles." 126

By July 6th fifty year old Harriet can leap onto a pony like a young person. She wrote,

On our return to camp we met Willie coming with Prince, and I jumped on his back without a saddle and rode off triumphantly. You will think I am rejuvenating and indeed I am, for I thought the day past when I could run, jump, and walk as I do now. 127

Harriet's 65 year old friend found her own health improved by the trip to California. Harriet quotes her friend, "Old Mrs. White, a Lady of sixty-five years says she really feels almost young again and attributes her improved health to the buoyancy of the climate." 128

Sarah Herndon's recorded that her 53 year old mother had her health improved by her journey. Sarah wrote,

August 31. Mother's birthday. She is fifty-three years old... we have been now four months on this journey. Have lived out of doors, in all sorts of weather. It has been very beneficial to mother. She was looking frail and delicate when we started, but seems to be in perfect health now and looks at least ten years younger. 129

THE WAGON TRAIN ENVIRONMENT

Several of the women believed like Sarah that living out-of-doors for four to six months had benefitted their health. The only roof over the heads of most emigrants was a wagon cover or a tent, and during the 2,000 mile journey the women had to adapt to the elements, to storms, to heat, to dust, to the sun, to animals, and to Indians.

Living in a covered wagon and a tent was a new experience for all of these women writers. Some liked it; others had a difficult time adjusting to all of the inconveniences and discomforts.

Eliza Spalding was expecting the trip to be more disagreeable than she found it. She wrote,

Camping out at night has not been so disagreeable and uncomfortable as I anticipated. Traveling on horseback has appeared to benefit my health, and I feel encouraged to hope by the blessings of God that I shall be enabled to endure the hardships of the long journey we have before us. 130

Near the end of her journey Rebecca Ketcham found that she had made the adjustment to trail living. She wrote, "...but all the fear I have of Indians, snakes or crossing rivers does not prevent me from lying on a very

hard bed and sleeping soundly and greatly enjoying the beauties we pass through during the day."131

To make their work easier and to make themselves more comfortable some women spent a lot of time and effort arranging their wagons for their convenience. Helen Carpenter described her wagon arrangements.

The greatest convenience of all, and one which none of the rest have, is a new fangled brake to check the speed in going downhill. The others have lock chains which are a great inconvenience and take up much time to fix and undo. All have boxes at the back of the wagons for carrying the cooking utensils. In ours there is a Dutch oven, a camp kettle, frying pan, and coffee pot. These, with some tin plates, tin cups, tin spoons, knives and forkd, a rolling-pin, bread pan, milk can and a smoothing iron, constitute my entire kitchen furniture.132

Eating, cooking, doing dishes, washing clothes, and making beds was not convenient nor easy in a covered wagon no matter how carefully things were planned and arranged. Esther Hanna was stating a fact and not complaining when she wrote, "All our work here requires stooping not having tables, chairs, or anything; it is very hard on the back."133

On the trail some of the women slept in wagons, some in tents, and a few in specially outfitted carriages. Mary Dutro wrote about her sleeping arrangements. "Us women sleep in the wagones we have one larg tent for the famely to eat in and have a dosin pic nic chares our men will all sleep in this tent."134

Lodisa Frizzeil and her husband made their bed in their wagon while their boys slept in a tent. She wrote,

Lloyd and I occupied the waggon while the boys slept in the tent. I had bought rag carpet enough to spread over the ground in the tent which proved excellent for keeping the wet or sand from getting on the bedding which consisted of buffalo robes and blankets.135

Mrs. Sawyer was part of a minority of emigrants who slept in comfort on featherbeds in a carriage. She wrote, "I sleep in my carriage every night on a feather bed, and am not exposed in any way in bad weather. The boys sleep in a the wagon or in the tent."136

Lucy Cooke and her husband William slept in a specially outfitted wagon with their baby. She wrote, "William and I have slept in the light wagon...it's very crowded in the wagon and I have to lay baby across our heads." 137

Esther Hanna and her husband started their journey in the comfort of a carriage and finished riding a pack mule and walking. Esther described the customized carriage in which they started.

Our carriage is very comfortable and we have a real nice little bedroom of it at night, shut it all up close, let down the backs of the seats, spread our mattress, hang up our clothes on the hooks which are put all around. I have my looking-glass, towel, etc. hung up and everything is in order. 138

Driving the wagons was usually the responsibility of a man, but some women drove a wagon full or part time and enjoyed doing it. Harriet Ward's husband challenged her to drive their wagon. She wrote,

Father. said, 'Now show yourself a woman and drive through (a slough). But this being the worst one we had met with I hesitated for a moment. Then, thinking we could not drown, I seized the whip and in we dashed and soon the good little ponies were dancing on Terra Firma again. 139

Mary Jane Guill drove her wagon regularly and in her journal wrote comments about the different animals she drove. "Put Betty in the waggon to work this morning for the first time on the road, she travels very well, don't pull as much as she might." 140

Patty Sessions, the Mormon midwife, was proud of her driving record. "I have drove my wagon all the way but part of the last two mountains P G drive a little I broke nothing nor turned over." 141

Mary Warner had the responsibility of driving a buggy much of the way. She never complained about driving. She wrote, "I have been assigned the buggy with a fine team of dapple gray, and they can go some I can tell you. Warner is usually ahead on horseback. My, but we are a wonderful looking

crowd. We are called the Warner Trail."¹⁴²

Mrs. Sawyer said she enjoyed driving a wagon. "I drive a great deal now, as I am very fond of handling the lines." ¹⁴³

Most of the women drove at least some of the time, often when the usual male driver was ill. Charlotte Pengra recorded one time when she drove as they passed the Grand Ronde area. She wrote, "Bynon and Sis is very unwell, they are anxious to go on I drove..."¹⁴⁴

Jane Tourtillot also drove when her husband was ill. She wrote, "Albert is not well today, so I drive. I have been in the habit of sleeping awhile every forenoon, so naturally I was very sleepy driving."¹⁴⁵

The women appeared to have been safe wagon drivers and were not involved in any accidents that were recorded, but accidents involving wagons were common along the trail. Harriet Clark described one wagon in her train which was prone to upset. She wrote, "John turned over again." A few days later she wrote, "John spilled over his wagon."¹⁴⁶

Sarah Cranstone recorded another wagon upset. She wrote,

Today we had another wagon tip over on a very sidling hill and a springy miry place at the bottom. There was not water enough to wet the things, Broke the wagon bows all up the only damage done. Got some willows and soon twisted up some and went on.¹⁴⁷

Many of the wagon accidents and upsets involved the women who frequently rode in the wagons, but most of the wagon upsets did not result in injury to the passengers. Celinda Hines was on the road to Westport when her mother's wagon overturned, and Celinda wrote,

The light wagon was behind, and being so much lighter, the oxen were frequently running ahead in spite of all Pa could do to prevent them. We had gone about two miles, Aunt E., Mother and M being in the wagon. They were going up a hill when the oxen attached to the light wagon rushed ahead, ran upon a

bank. Pa ran to prevent the wagon from upsetting as it was running onto the bank on one side and coming into collision with the provision wagon. As he was trying to hold it up, it upset, jamming him against the other wagon and bruising him very much. He could not tell us how much he was hurt and we feared he had received some internal injury which would in the end prove fatal. Mother, Aunt E. and Martha were tipped out uninjured. The wagon was not materially broken, but things were strewn all along the road.¹⁴⁸

A couple of weeks later Celinda herself was tipped out of a wagon.

She wrote,

Aunt Lydia, Julia, Lucy Ann and myself were in Charles' wagon. As we were going down the bank the wagon tipped over. None were much hurt, but L. A. and myself being behind the others and the things coming upon us, we could not move...The wagon was injured a little. The contents of the provisions chest were mostly emptied into the stream.¹⁴⁹

Occasionally wagon accidents resulted in serious injury or even death. Eliza McAuley witnessed a fatal accident when a woman's dress got caught in a wagon wheel. Eliza wrote, "In coming down a steep hill a woman attempted to jump from the wagon with the child in her arms. Her dress caught in the wheel and she was drawn under and crushed to death."¹⁵⁰

Maria Belshaw reported an injury-accident in her journal.

"Mrs. Coonts was getting into her wagon, slipped and fell under the wagon, two wheels passed over her, no bones broken."¹⁵¹

Although the women rode in wagons on their trip to Oregon or California, most of the women also rode horses on the trail at least part of the time. Many of them had never ridden horseback before, but all of these women improved their skill riding. Myra Eells was concerned as she tried out her horse in 1838 and prepared to ride 2,000 miles to Oregon. Myra wrote, "Ride a little way to try our horses; do not know how I shall succeed in riding."¹⁵² Myra was an accomplished and experienced horseback rider by the time she reached Oregon-Washington, and she felt like this experience had prepared her for living on the frontier. She said,

"We had a long hard horseback journey, but suppose we are the better qualified to live in this country as there is no other mode of conveyance here."153

Most of women rode horseback only part of the time. Algeline Ashley wrote about her riding, "I ride horseback some every day."

There are a few records of women riding horseback during pregnancy. Catherine Washburn was in the last months of her pregnancy when she wrote, "I rode several miles on horse back today."155

Myra Eells wrote about a woman in her party who rode 25 miles on the day before and 15 miles on the same day she gave birth. Myra wrote, "About 10 o'clock Messrs S and C and wife came into camp. Mrs. C. brings an infant daughter; suppose she rode 25 miles yesterday, fifteen today."156

Side-saddle was the popular style of horseback riding for women in the mid-1800's. Mary Burrel was excited when her family purchased a side-saddle, but it apparently was not used a lot because they discarded it later. Mary wrote, "Lightened our load considerable, threw away the side-saddle, a man' saddle, 6 blankets, some other clothing and traps, dinner box etc."157

Fewer than half-a-dozen women record accidents involving the women who rode horseback on the trail. Eliza Spaulding described her horseback riding accident in 1836. "August 6. Yesterday my horse became unmanageable in consequence of stepping into a hornets nest. I was thrown and notwithstanding my foot remained a moment in the stirrup, and my body dragged some distance, I received no serious injury."158

Two years later Mary Walker experienced a fall from a horse. "My horse fell and tumbled me over his head, did not hurt me."159

One woman was seriously injured when her horse threw her.

Jane Tourtillot wrote, "June 13. A lady on our train was thrown from her horse and injured quite severely. They sent on ahead a mile for a Doctor, who was in the next train."¹⁶⁰

Riding horseback day after day, sitting in a wagon week after week brought these women into close contact with horses, cows, and mules. Many women developed strong attachments for their animals.

Two of the women had cows named 'Brindle' and both of the cows had calves enroute. In 1852 Cornelia Sharp wrote, "Brindle had a calf."¹⁶¹

Eight years later Mary Jane Guill wrote, "Brindle has got a calf, she had it about twelve."¹⁶² Mary Jane records the births of other calves. on the trail and frequently mentions her animals in her journal.

Lodisa Frizzell revealed her affection for animals when she wrote,

Saw several head of stock which had gave out, one old cow by the road with a paper pined on her head, it stated that she had been left to die, but if anyone chose, they might have her, but requested that they would not abuse her as she had been one of the best of cows, she looked so pittiful and it called up so many associations in my mind that it affected me to tears.¹⁶³

. Esther Hanna was moved to tears when her mare lay down as if to die. Esther wrote, "She appeared to fail every step and finally she lay down on the roadside. I cannot describe my feeling at this time. This noble animal that had been of so much service to us and worth so much to us if we got her through had now as we thought, laid down to die...I bursted into a flood of tears."¹⁶⁴ This mare recovered from exhaustion and was cheered when the hired man brought her into camp several days later.

Many women wrote about family dogs which were taken along on the journey to California or Oregon. Pet dogs were a mixed blessing on the trail. Elizabeth Wood recorded how one wagon train dealt with dogs which had frightened cattle.

One morning at the break of day I was awakened by a disturbance among the cattle which had got frightened at the barking of a dog.. They run against the wagons, broke the wheels and tongue of ours, and bawled in an estampede...The captain ordered all the dogs to be killed and in obedience to his commands, our faithful 'Tray' was shot. 165

Young Virginia Reed's pet was killed for a different reason in 1846. Stranded and starving she wrote, "We had to kill little Cash, the dog, and eat him. We ate his head and feet and hide and everything...we lived on little Cash a week." 166

Most of the 63 women became accustomed to living out-of-doors. Some wrote about this change in themselves after they arrived in California or Oregon where they first stayed in a house at the end of their journeys. Helen Clark reported that living in a house required another adjustment, after months on the trail. She wrote, "We feel queer in a house again." 167

Helen Carpenter reported that her seven month old sister cried the first time they stayed in a house in California. In her journal she wrote,

Here at Emory's Crossing of Yube was a hotel and toll bridge and a number of little board shanties. The proprietor let us to into one for the night and we found it much more comfortable than being outside in the rain. An old clock ticking on the wall constituted the furnishings. The baby, now seven months old, got badly frightened on hearing it tick. In fact, she was so afraid of indoors that she was repeatedly taken outside that being the only thing that would pacify her. In our travels she has become a child of nature. 168

The longer they travelled in the wilderness, the more accustomed the women became to the trail lifestyle. Many overcame fears of snakes, Indians, wild animals, and storms, but personal safety was always a concern for women on the trail. Most women depended upon their husbands, grown sons, fathers, or other males in their party for protection from Indians, robbers, and wild animals.

On the trail most men carried firearms. They used rifles and shotguns to hunt buffalo, antelope, rabbits, ducks, and other game. They also used guns to protect themselves and their families when Indians, animals, robbers, or other things threatened their safety.

A few women carried firearms on the trail. Mary Warner and her friend Mrs. Lord both carried little guns for self-protection. Mary wrote,

Like my friend Mrs. Lord, I keep close to my gun and my dog... A Frenchman came riding on horseback into our camp, asking many questions; and not at all liking his manner, Warner told him we were all well armed and Mrs. Lord took the occasion to exhibit her little gun she always wore at her side. Sometimes I really get afraid she might accidently shoot some of us.¹⁶⁹

Some women practiced using their firearms and shot at targets as they travelled. Eliza McAuley threatened some Indians with her gun and practiced target shooting one day, and then she wrote about it her journal.

Got one of Meeker's wagons across and one of ours this morning leaving the rest of our train on the eastern side. Mrs. Meeker and I crossed with them and wre left alone to guard the wagons while the men were at work repairing the boat. Some Pawnee Indians came around, and getting impudent and troublesome, we pointed empty pistols at them and told them to 'pucachee' or we would shoot them. The ruse succeeded and they soon left us. In the afternoon having nothing else to do we amused ourselves by shooting at a mark.¹⁷⁰

Jane Tourtillot described how she and her friend practiced their marksmanship. "Lou and I shot at a mark with a revolver. The boys said we did first rate for new beginners."¹⁷¹

CLOTHING

Wearing and shooting guns was probably a new experience for these women who discovered that they needed some new skills to travel and live away from civilization. In addition to new skills the women found they also needed new and different clothing for their comfort, safety, and convenience on the trail and in the west. Riding horseback, jumping in and out of wagons, and washing clothes in rivers and streams put some

new demands on the women's apparel and fashions of the day. On the trail they needed special hats to protect their faces from sunburn, they needed clothing made of material that would wear well and not show the mud and dust from the trail, and they needed styles that would permit them to ride horses and climb in and out wagon and up and down hills without restricting their movement or getting caught in the wagon wheels or bushes.

Sunbonnets and bloomers were the two new articles of clothing mentioned most frequently in the diaries and journals written by the women on the trail. Sunbonnets were worn on the trail by the second group of women to go west in 1838 and were mentioned at various times all during the 30 years of heavy trail travel.

Bloomers came later and seem to have first been worn by women on the trail in 1852. A year earlier the advocate of women's rights Amelia Bloomer became famous for the Turkish pantaloons when she wore them with a skirt that came only just below her knees. She wore her new fashion to lectures and popularized the style which became known as bloomers.¹⁷² From 1852 women found bloomers to be appropriate and comfortable to wear on the trail.

Long skirts and dresses were worn by women on the trail in the 1830's and 1840's. In 1838 Myra Eells recommended, "A lady should have a good green merino or pongee dress and a loose calico dress to wear when she does not need her cloak. Her underclothes...should all be colored. They ought to have three changes to wear on the journey. They should have a Florence bonnet or a variegated straw...A lady should have a pair of gentlemen's calf shoes and be well supplied with stockings and shoes. " ¹⁷³

Few of the women actually discuss dress or style in their journals in the 1830's and 1840's, but many mention their apparel when they tore it, washed it, or sewed it. Rebecca Ketcham gave some clues to what she wore while

crossing the plains in 1853. "Yesterday I had changed every article of clothing I had on except my quilted skirt and sack."¹⁷⁴

Another time Rebecca wrote,

In jumping off the horse alone today, I caught my dress in the horn of the saddle and tore almost half of the skirt off. That I must mend it tonight. I have had no dress on since the day we came to Westport but my palm-leaf muslin delaine. I mean to stick to it as long as I can. It is very dirty and has been torn nearly if not quite twenty times, but another would look nearly as bad in a day or two. As long as I look as well as the rest, I don't care.¹⁷⁵

Cecelia Adams wore a wool dress on the trail in 1852. She wrote,

"Last night my clothes got out of the wagon and the oxen ate them up, so I consider I have met with a great loss, as it was my woolen dress."¹⁷⁶

In 1847 Tamsen Donner wrote a letter home and recommended wearing linsey dresses on the trail. "Linsey dresses are the most suitable for children. Indeed if I had one it would be comfortable."¹⁷⁷

Long dresses or skirts were not practical for many of the conditions on the trail. Wind, rain, dust, and mud were all conditions in which the long skirts were not suitable. On horseback and in wagons the long skirts were hazards and got caught on things. Helen Carpenter described two women's solution to wearing long skirts in the wind. She wrote,

The high wind which prevailed interfered very much with our locomotion and switched the dresses about leaving the pedal extremities in a precarious condition. To overcome this Aunt Sis and Emily pinned some rocks in the bottom of their skirts never dreaming of the black shins they would carry for the next week.¹⁷⁸

Rain dampened many emigrants and their spirits on the trail, and it was difficult for the women to change clothing while the wagons were moving, so many did as Mary Burrel described, "Rode with wet underclothes all the forenoon."¹⁷⁹

The dust was very deep on the ground and thick in the air at many places along the trail. In the worst places the women donned veils or goggles to filter out the dust so they did not have to breathe it.

Esther Hanna wrote, "We all have to wear either veils or goggles, some wear handkerchiefs over their faces."¹⁸⁰

Margaret Frink also mentioned the dust when she wrote, "The heat is sometimes oppressive. The dust is intolerable. Many wear silk handkerchiefs over their faces, others wear goggles."¹⁸¹



Figure 3. Descending the Blue Mountains by M. Loy Wagoner. From a drawing of the Whitman-Spalding party.¹⁸²

In the wagon trains and on the trail matters of convenience and comfort often became more important than appearance to the emigrants, but the women became more conscious of their appearances as they approached towns and civilization. Tanned by sun and wind, the women commented on their appearances. Helen Clark was surprised by how tan she looked one day. "Mary and I wash and dress and also look in the glass and oh my face is black enough to be a squaw." 183

Mary Warner wrote that she was concerned about appearances only when she was approaching civilized places. "June 20. Now as we get nearer civilized conditions, take stock of our clothes and our appearances." 184

Approaching her destination in California Lucy Cooke wrote that she needed nice underclothes. "If I only had some muslin, how nice I could be preparing our underclothes, for we each are quite destitute. I have no night dress at all, so sleep in a colored sacque." 185

Bloomers became popular attire on the trail in 1852, but there was controversy surrounding bloomers. Many women wrote that they wore bloomers on the trail or wrote comments about other women who wore them. Lucy Cooke wore bloomers and wrote, "I wear bloomers, as do most of the women folks in the different companies." 186

Eliza McAuley wore short dresses and bloomers. "My sister and I wear short dresses and bloomers and our foot gear includes a pair of light calf-skin top boots for wading through mud and sand." 187

Mrs. Sawyer felt bloomers were appropriate on the trail and wished that she had some. She wrote,

We have been traveling for several days in company with an old gentleman and his family. He has with him, his wife, two sons, daughter and daughter's husband. The daughter is dressed in bloomer costume, pants, short skirt and red-top boots. I think it is a very appropriate dress for a trip like this. So many ladies wear it, that I almost wish that I was so attired myself.

The old lady wears a short skirt and pantletts. She is fifty years years old. Her health was not good when she started, but it is improving now.¹⁸⁸

Helen Clark made herself a pair of bloomers while she was travelling the trail in 1860. She wrote, "Pluck some flowers I conclude I better finish the bloomers I began yesterday." ¹⁸⁹

A squaw noticed Helen's bloomers, and Helen noted this incident in her journal.

We camped for dinner on the Platte and a tribe of Cheyennes came along with their dogs and ponies, some of them have this year's colts saddled for the papooses to ride. Some of the prettiest ponies for only ten dollars but they won't take anything but silver dollars and we have nothing but half dollars. It is a very large tribe, we see one squaw 80 years old, she laughs at my bloomers.¹⁹⁰

There were other women on the trail who were not advocates for bloomers. In 1853 Harriet Ward described a woman and judged her by her bloomer attire. "We left encampment at an early hour and took a long walk with Mrs. Singletary whom notwithstanding her bloomer dress, we found to be a sensible, pleasant woman." ¹⁹¹

As a young bride Mary Warner and the other young women of her party planned to wear bloomers and put them on for the first time as their caravan was crossing the Nebraska prairies. Mary felt very self-conscious in her bloomer outfit and wrote a description of her feelings in her journal.

April 13. Two days in camp, I feel like a squaw all ready and if you were to see me you would say, yes you look it. The rest of our women folks have put on their bloomers. Well I put on mine and soon took them off. Celia and I went away down the bluff and there we practiced with them. Celia concluded she had the courage to wear hers, but not I. So I got back into my other clothes. Just think of it-brave enough to cross the plains but not brave enough to wear bloomers. Well when I got back in camp they all laughed at me. Mrs. Lord, the man's wife who is in our company, called me proud, said I wanted to look better than the rest, etc. but then I said I would never wear them as long as my other two dresses last...¹⁹²

The women commented on bloomers and other fashions and fads worn on the trail. Hoops were fashionable in the east in the 1850's, but hoops were definitely not practical to wear on the trail. One bride did wear hoops in 1857, and Helen Carpenter saw and described her as they travelled along the Platte River.

June 19. There is a bride and groom in the Inmann party. The bride wears hoops. We have read of hoops. We have read of hoops being worn, but they had not reached Kansas before we left so these are the first we have seen and would not recommend them for this mode of traveling. The wearer has less personal privacy than the Pawnee in his blanket. In asides the bride is called, 'Miss Hoopy.'¹⁹³

Many women wore sunbonnets to protect their face, eyes, and lips from the sun and wind. This headgear provided wearers with some protection from the elements. Women sewed them just before leaving home or else they made them as they travelled. Sarah Smith made a sunbonnet while she went west and wrote, "Am making a gingham sunbonnet which I had not time to make before I left the States."¹⁹⁴

On the trail Lucy Cooke made a sunbonnet for herself and her little daughter. "We rode very comfortably yesterday from Kanesville. Baby sat in her chair most of the time, whilst Ma and I sewed. Yes, sewed! Don't laugh I made Sis a little sunbonnet." Later Lucy wrote, "My clothing is very shabby now. That pink calico sunbonnet I have worn on Sundays and week days, and when it looked too mean I made another out of an old lilac calico I brought from England."¹⁹⁵

Charlotte Pengra loaned her sunbonnet pattern to another woman who was going to California. She wrote, "I received a call from a lady by the name of Smith, that was going to California with her husband, she wished the pattern of my sunbonnet which I have with pleasure."¹⁹⁶

After sewing her tent Celinda Hines made some sunbonnets. She wrote, "I sewed on the tent all day...Aunt Lydia gave Julia and myself materials

for some sunbonnets. We busied ourselves in making them." 197

As the wagons rolled west, some of the women passengers sewed. Women made bloomers, shirts, skirts, and underwear as the wagon trains went westward. Mary Warner did her handwork at an unusual place and wrote, "June 11 - as we hope to soon send letters home will send journal and a tatin collar to Mother made at times while in camp. I have made two, one for myself, finished one while on the summit of Rocky Mountains." 198

Most of the 63 women writers on the trail had some responsibility for the clothing worn by their husbands and children as well as their own. Mending and washing clothing were both activities which the women mentioned frequently in their diaries and journals. A few did some ironing on the trail.

The emigrants washed their clothes and also bathed in the same rivers and streams where they obtained their drinking water and where they watered their livestock. The trail never strayed far from the life-sustaining rivers and streams, the Kansas, the Platte, the Sweetwater, the Snake, the Columbia, the Humboldt, all provided the emigrants with water for drinking and washing.

Rebecca Ketcham described her clothes washing procedure in her journal. She wrote,

Before we moved camp again Camilla and I went down near the stream and did our washing. We had a fire built on the ground where we heated our water. We have only one small wash tub and one wash board, but with the help of pails and washdish we managed to get through a pretty large washing. Ironing of course was dispensed with. 199

Men often helped the women do the washing. They started the fires which were used to heat the water, they carried the tubs to the river, and occasionally they did the washing. Mary Bailey described one occasion when the men in her party did the washing. "Stopped at noon to wash and attend to other matters...It was really amusing to see the men stand in the river

to wash. They all acted so awkward."200

Washing clothes was hard work for emigrants on the trail, and washing needed to be done frequently. All of the washing equipment and the clothing had to be carried to and from the river, and a fire had to be built to heat the wash water. The emigrants needed to wash frequently because there was always dust, mud, and wind on the trail and most emigrants were travelling as light as possible and did not have many changes of clothing with them.

The emigrants washed whenever they were camped near a suitable river or stream. Sometimes emigrants washed in the morning, others washed while trains stopped for nooning. Mary Walker washed in the morning and wrote, "Rose early, kindled the fire, boiled my clothes, finished by washing before breakfast." 201

Narcissa Whitman travelled so fast and such long hours in the fur traders' caravan that she found it difficult to have time to wash clothes. She wrote, "This is the third time I have washed since I left the states. Last night I put my clothes in water and this morning finished washing before breakfast." (August 20, 1836).202

The women with babies and young children probably washed more frequently than others. Lucy Cooke washed often. She wrote, "I went to washing as soon as things were fixed, for with a baby to care for there's always something to wash." 203

Some of the emigrants tried innovative ways to wash and used the hot springs along the trail for washing machines. Charlotte Pengra and found the hot springs washing to be effective. She wrote, "Soda Springs-Some Mormon traders were washing their clothes in it. They put them in the Spring and the action of the watter did the rubbing." 204

Catherine Washburn also used nature's washing machines. She wrote,

"There is two boiling springs and a cold one between them I went and washed in one it is soft and cleansing." 205

Margaret Frink wrote about the same springs.

This morning we started at eight o'clock, and soon came to springs that were boiling hot. Only five feet from them was another as cold as ice. Here were men engaged in washing their clothing. Their position was such that after washing a garment in the boiling springs they could take it by the waist band and fling it across into the cold spring, and visa versa with perfect ease.²⁰⁶

Often emigrants washed clothes and bathed at the same place in the river or stream. Mary Burrell wrote, "Washed after dark some things and took a refreshing wash before going to bed." 207

Bathing was a social activity for the women. Many women who were travelling together would gather and go down to the river. Almost all of the women's diary and journal entries which mention bathing also name at least one companion who went with the writer to bathe in the river or stream. Often whole groups of women went together probably for mutual protection. Harriet Ward mentions 'young ladies' going together. "The young ladies took a bath and were caught in the shower." 208

Some baths were really more like swimming parties but only one woman described her bathing suit in her diary. Lucy Cooke wrote, "Ma, William, myself and the young ones bathed in a creek the other evening. I wore my flannel for a bathing suit." 209

Bathing in the rivers and streams was sometimes an enjoyable treat, and at other times it was more like a torture when storms, cold weather, and muddy rivers were encountered. Celinda Hines enjoyed her bath in the Boise River. "On the Boise. Had a fine bath in the river." 210

Camped near Chimney Rock (Nebraska) Charlotte Pengra bathed in the Platte. "Mrs. Allison and myself took a bath in the river and were very much refreshed." 211

Helen Carpenter and Lucy Cooke bathed in the same river and did not like the muddy water. Helen wrote,

In the dusk of the evening the women went a short distance down stream for a dip in the river even if the water was somewhat thick. At this point there was almost no bank, but the tall bunch grass and increasing darkness was a sufficient protection against a peeping Thomas if there had been one in camp.²¹²

Lucy objected to the mud. "Ma, Lillie, and I went and bathed, but it is a nasty, muddy stream, with very swift current. Still a bath seems always to benefit, and it's our only chance for ablution."²¹³

Some of the rivers along the trail were positively cold, but some women bathed in them anyway. Helen Carpenter wrote about the Sweetwater (Wyoming), "We took a bath in the ice cold water of the Sweetwater."²¹⁴

RECREATION AND LEISURE

These bathing and swimming parties were only one form of entertainment in which the women on the trail participated. During the four to six months long journey the women found time to socialize and visit back and forth between wagons and even between wagon trains, to fish together in the streams and river, to dance and sing with other emigrants in the evenings, and to play ball after lunch or supper.²¹⁵ Sundays often provided time for leisure for the wagon trains who observed the Sabbath. The women also enjoyed individual leisure activities like reading, tatting, sewing, and writing letters, journals, and diaries.

Many women went fishing as they travelled west. Judging from the number of times it is mentioned in the women's diaries and journals, fishing was one of the more popular activities on the trail. Mary Warner went fishing and wrote about it.

After crossing Ham's Fork we went about two or three miles farther and camped on Black Fork, about two o'clock, after going twenty-two miles. Mrs. Dunwell, Aunt Celia and I tried to fish but we finally concluded that there were no fish in the river.²¹⁶

Mary Jane Guill tried her luck and wrote, "I tried to catch some fish but I had no luck too poor a fisher to catch them Mr. Guill and Ken caught several small ones. There is some very nice fish in the river."

Harriet Clark went fishing and wrote, "Keeler and tried our luck fishing." 218

Sarah Herndon caught some fish.

Several of us young folks went fishing this afternoon. I have often gone fishing but do not remember ever catching anything of any consequence or having any luck...so imagine my excitement and surprise when the fish began to bite, and drew them out almost as fast as I could get my hook baited. Frank baited my hook and strung the fish on a forked willow switch.²¹⁹

Helen Stewart went fishing several times on the trail, but she did not like it very much. She wrote, "We can fish to our satisfaction but I neather like to put the grasshopper on nor take the fish, poor things." Another time she wrote, "I have been trying to fish but cannot catch any only little ones." Still another day she wrote, "We all went fishing this evening there was eleven in number of us I believe thay all caught some thing me, I got two little wee things that was not worth ceaping and threw them into the water again." 220

Lodisa Frizzell wanted to catch a lot of fish and wished she had a seine. She wrote, "George (her son) caught some small fish with a pinhook. Here was a small stream full of little fishes, which if we had had a small sceine, we might have caught any amount."²²¹

Music and dancing entertained many emigrants in the evenings as they travelled westward across the prairies and mountains. Musical instruments played on the trail ranged from violins and guitars to melodians and accordians. Elizabeth Geer enjoyed music and wrote, "We have plenty of music with the flute and violin and some dancing."²²²

Cecelia Adams enjoyed music and dancing on the trail. She wrote, "Last night we had music and dancing. It makes it seem quite like home to hear the accordeon which Cecelia plays almost every evening."223

Mary Fish was amused by a dancing party in the dust and wrote,

The young people of our company are having quite a merry time this evening. They are dancing on sand a little less than two feet deep. Mr. L. Fish is playing on the violin. The dancers raise such a dust that it is hard to see the fiddler. Mr. E. Fish is master of ceremonies which ceremony consists in raising all the dust they can without choking themselves.224

Mary Burrel had her melodion with her and played it on the trail. She wrote, "I played on the melodion for them. They were pleased and wanted Hannibal to dance."225

Several young men in Sallie Hester's caravan had musical instruments with them and played frequently. She wrote,

Raft River: This week some of our company left us, all young men. They were jolly, merry fellows and gave life to our lonely evenings. We'll miss them very much. Some had violins, others guitars, and some had fine voices, and they always had a good audience. They were anxious to hurry without the Sunday stops.226

Fiddles were popular on the trail. Melen Carpenter, Mary Jane Guill, and Mary Burrel all mention fiddles in their journals. Helen wrote, "Billy got his 'fiddle' out and sawed for awhile."227

Mary Jane appreciated the music and wrote, "We had some music last night by Mr. Wildason on the fiddle, sounded well." Another day she wrote,

Last night we had a seranade last night between the hours of ten and eleven. Music sounded delightful, the instruments consisted of one fiddle and banjo. It enlivened me up very much out here away from home enjoying the wilds of a western life with all its scenery and enchantment.228

Mary mentioned a whole evening of activities. "Had some fiddling and dancing, washing, baking, knitting, reading old compositions of Wes' scholars."229

'Begone Dull Care', 'Oh Suzanna', and 'Mansion of Happiness' were three of the songs which the emigrants sang in the wilderness. Harriet Ward mentioned these tunes. "The young ladies Mr. Poland and myself, took a long walk which terminated very pleasantly indeed in singing, 'Begone Dull Care.' Another day she wrote, "Mr. White and his sisters, with Frank, are enjoying themselves with their guitars and the 'Mansions of Happiness' etc. and are a lively, pleasant group indeed." 230

Lucy Cooke wrote in her journal part of the lyric of one song, "Oh, Susannah, don't you cry for me, I'm bound for California, The gold dust for to see." 231

Harriet Ward appreciated the wilderness setting for one evening of singing. "Frank (her daughter) and the young gentlemen enjoyed a pleasant evening, playing and singing in this lone wilderness, entirely surrounded by mountains, which perhaps never before echoed to the sound of the guitar." 232

Marie Norton enjoyed an evening songfest on the trail and wrote, "We had quite a good sing last night after our work was finished before retiring." 233

Reading and writing were other leisure activities which the women on the trail enjoyed. Some emigrants took along books. Harriet Ward enjoyed reading and wrote, .

: Miss Sarah W., very fortunately for us, has a large supply of books. I have read the The Lady of the Lake and Lallah Rooke until they have become old stories. I have just finished one of Eugene Lue's works, First Love, and I am sure it is a work which I would not wish to put into the hands of the young. 234

Charlotte Pengra was another woman who read on the trail. She wrote, "...have read a little." 235

Harriet Ward spent some time reading on her trip to California. She wrote, "After walking as far as we dared to go alone, we sat ourselves upon a large crystal rock, where we passed a half hour in reading and writing." 236

Harriet Ward mentions in another entry that her son read Thackeray's Henry Esmond as he rested in the family wagon.

Helen Carpenter read a book as she travelled and wrote, "I did succeed in finishing my book, Dred or the Dismal Swamp." 237

Helen Stewart read at night, probably by candlelight or campfire light. She wrote,

We are divided tonight some is on one side (of the river) and we are one the other...Mary, Agnes and the children and my own dear self was in the outside wagon we was afraid to go to sleep and we had a notion to read all night but after we read awhile we thought that the light might attract attention so we put it out. 238

Charlotte Pengra read during her leisure time on the trail. She wrote, "Mrs. A and I went and sat on the bank of the river and had a pleasant conversation I have found her a sister Adventist, I spent the afternoon mostly in reading." 239

Walking was a popular change of pace for many women on the trail. They walked with their families and with friends along the trail, and they often gathered wild flowers and berries on their walks. Harriet Ward wrote about walking with her husband and friends. "Frank, Willie, and myself took a pleasant walk to gather wild flowers, then returned to the wagon to commence making our tent." 240 Another time she wrote, "Mrs. Quigley, Mrs. Palmer, Frank and myself took a long pleasant walk."

Cecelia Adams wrote that she enjoyed looking at the countryside on her walk. "P. and self walked on several miles...This is a beautiful part of the country and very level. Once in a while see a bird...We do enjoy ourselves very well. We have some good neighbors in our company." 242

Charlotte Pengra picked and collected wild flowers as she walked along the trail. She wrote, "...took a walk, gathered some flowers and enjoyed myself pretty well..." 243

Several women pressed the wildflowers they gathered along the

trail and preserved them. Algeline Ashley pressed some but ended up throwing them away. She wrote, "I pressed some of the blossoms and some other flowers but they were thrown away with the old history." ²⁴⁴

Caroline Richardson's and Harriet Ward's journals both bear the imprints of flowers which these two women gathered along the trail and carefully placed between the pages of their journal for preservation.

Some women named and even counted the wild flowers they found. Mary Burrel observed the flowers and wrote, "In ascending we found 48 different kinds of flowers, some very pretty." ²⁴⁵

Children and adults alike found time to play as their wagon trains rolled westward. ²⁴⁶ They often took advantage of whatever was at hand and hung swings in trees, or had snowball fights at the one or two places along the trail where there was snow.

Children and even adults were attracted to the snow at a few places. Margaret Frink had a snowball fight when it unexpectedly snowed at Willow Springs (Wyoming). She wrote, "We snowballed each other till ten o'clock, when the sun got too warm for the snow to melt." ²⁴⁷

Ball games were often organized by men, women, and children who enjoyed the sport. No one identifies the game, but it likely was baseball. Mary Warner wrote that she played, "Here we spend the Sabbath, some writing, others reading, and I think some did washing. We played ball." ²⁴⁸

Jane Tourtillot watched the men play and wrote, "The men had a ball-play towards night. Seemed to enjoy themselves very much, it seemed like old times." ²⁴⁹

Harriet Ward and her family spent one evening on the trail reminiscing

about the family and friends they left in the east. She wrote, "We took out our Daguerreotypes and tried to live over again some of the happy days of Auld Lang Syne, Dear little Trow (a grandson) I could gaze upon your sweet face forever."250

Some of the travel itself was entertainment. Many women rode horseback or walked on side excursions and left the trail to investigate landmarks and explore the countryside. They rode horseback or walked to see such natural phenomena as Chimney Rock, Scotts Bluff, Independence Rock, Devils Gate, the Great Salt Lake, hot springs and geysers.

Mary Burrel rode horseback to investigate the area around Chimney Rock. She wrote, "Isaac, Wesley, Frank, Ed and wife and myself all on horseback rode around the mountains (near the rock) all the forenoon."251

Harriet Griswold was interested in the Great Salt Lake. "August 16 Henry and some of the boys took a bath in it and brought a specimen of the salt from the shore. It is impossible to sink in it, the _____ so strong with salt and there are no fish in it."252

The wild animals along the trail provided entertainment for some emigrants. A few of the women reported that they obtained antelopes or buffalo calves for trail when the young animals were captured by emigrants. Hunting was another activity which entertained many men on the trail.

Rebecca Geer described catching two buffalo calves and trying to keep them with the herd of cattle. She wrote, "Caught two of their calves. One ran away the other day. The other they drove along with the loose cattle several miles."253

Agnes and Helen Stewart wanted to keep two baby antelopes as pets. Helen wrote, "...brought two living antelopes oh they are the dearest little things I ever saw."254

Agnes also wrote about the antelopes,

Two antelope were coming toward the camp and two of the fellows took
 funs and chased them, but did not get any and I was glad for the
 poor things were at home and we were the intruders...One of the
 men caught two antelope. They are dear little creatures. They are a
 kind of brown or dun color. They let them go again, but I should
 have liked to have had one for a pet.²⁵⁵

Eliza McAuley's boys captured a baby antelope and her family kept it
 as a pet for several days. She wrote, "The boys caught a little antelope and
 brought it back to camp...our antelope Jenny is a great pet in camp and is
 equally fond of Margaret and me. She bleats and cries if either one is away
 from her." ²⁵⁶

Some of the boys and men enjoyed shooting animals along the trail just
 for the sport of it. The women often spoke out against shooting for sport.
 Lodisa Frizzell did not want the boys in her train to shoot prairie dogs and
 wrote,

Passed a large prairie dog town...the boys shot several of them
 although I begged them not to hurt them for it is pitiful to see
 them when one is wounded or killed outside and cannot get into his
 hole; others will rush out and drag him in then they will commence
 barking with all their might and directly the whole town joins in,
 as if they had been informed and understood that one of their number
 was wounded or dead.²⁵⁷

The women enjoyed other activities as they journeyed westward with
 family and friends. A few mentioned playing chess and other games, and at
 least three women sketched and painted enroute.

Mary Warner wrote that she played chess, but was criticized for doing
 this. Mary wrote, "June 10 Aunt Celia and I played chess, which Mrs. Lord
 thought was the first step toward gambling."²⁵⁸

Paintings and sketches of Indians, trail landmarks, and the wagon
 trains were made by some of the emigrants. Mary Warner wrote about one
 young woman in her party who sketched some bluffs. "Celia sketched the
 bluffs and will make a painting of it when through."²⁵⁹

Lodisa Frizzell and Mrs. E. A. Hadley were artists. As artists these two women were exceptionally good observers and wrote vivid descriptions in their journals. Lodisa made a watercolor painting of some Indians which was included in the published version of her journal.²⁶⁰ Mrs. Hadley noted in her journal the places where she made sketches.

Monday June 2. Road runs along the river to day passed court house rock, south side the river. It is on the top of the ridge of bluffs, and ascends up in a square form two-thirds of its height and then forms another square on the top looks as much like a court house as anything can, I will give you a draft in the back of the book. It is about two-hundred feet high above the main ridge very romantic, see a company on the other side of the river, stop to dine in sight of chimney rock, I seated myself this day noon to sketch it as near as I can from so great a distance and from observation you will (see) this also in the back part of the book.²⁶¹

RELIGION

The Sabbath was a whole day of leisure on the trail for some of the emigrants. The question of travel on the Sabbath was an issue which caused much dissention among the emigrants and was often the reason for parties to divide or split.

Some of the women expressed their belief that all wagons all emigrants on the trail should stop and lay-over for the day no matter where they were or what situation they were in. Lucy Cooke held this viewpoint, and she and her family made a firm resolve not to travel on the Sabbath. As a result of this practice of stopping on Sunday, several families withdrew from their train. Lucy mentions this division in her journal. "Pa having resolved not to travel on Sunday unless compelled, consequently the Perrins left us." ²⁶²

At least two women concluded that it was less sinful to travel on Sunday than it was to stop because so many emigrants labored washing clothes, repairing wagons, and doing other chores whenever the trains

stopped. Marie Norton decided it was better to travel on the Sabbath and wrote, "July 10 We are going to travel again today, as we think that it is better than to lay over, as the boys will wash and do a great many things that I think are worse than traveling."263

Helen Stewart also explained her position in her journal. "July 3, Sunday. we start this morning I think it is hardly right to rest two days and then start on this day but we are all so wicked that we do far more harm when we are stopped than when we are going." 264

Most of the emigrants took their religious beliefs and practices with them on the trail. Many of the wagon trains had worship services on Sunday. These services were held in a variety of settings at almost every time of day and night. The services were often led by a minister and included prayers, preaching, scripture reading, and music. In her diary Sallie Hester described a service she attended. "September 17. Had preaching out under the pines at night. The men built a fire and we all gathered around it in camp-meeting style."265

Esther Hanna attended a worship service in a tent at the eastern end of the trail. She wrote, "Mr. Yantis (a Presbyterian minister) and train are camped near us, it is pleasant to have a tabernacle in the wilderness; they had two or three large tents put up together and seats placed so as to accommodate all."266

Sarah Herndon described a worship service on the trail.

Sunday, June 25. We have had a preaching service this afternoon... The services were well attended, and the sermon was fine. He compared our situation with that of 'the Children of Israel' in the wilderness. He spoke of God's care for them and that He careth for us, spoke in an earnest manner of our dependence upon God, and our inability to take care of ourselves, or to accomplish anything without God's help and cooperation, and of the necessity of earnest prayer and faith in all circumstances of life...When the people were gathered at the call of the bugle, some sat on chairs in the shade of wagons, some under umbrellas, some in carriages and light wagons."267

Just as Sarah Herndon's minister had compared the emigrant's situation with the children of Israel in the wilderness, some of the emigrants believed they too were on a religious mission in the wilderness. Certainly the missionary wives travelling in 1836 and 1838 believed strongly in the religious purpose of their trip. Other women felt this sense of mission also.

Some of the women compared their situations and themselves to Lot's wife in the Bible. Lot's wife had been warned not to look back with longing at the possessions and the life she was leaving behind as she and her husband walked away from the evil city of Sodom. Lot's wife made the mistake of glancing backwards and as a result was turned into a pillar of salt.

Sarah Smith believed that it was evil for her to think about the home and family she had left in the east, but she felt homesick. She described her ambivalence in her journal, "I sometimes feel I would like to sit once more at dear mother's table with father, mother, brother and sister, but I fear it is wrong. I would not send one wicked, sinful glance to my dear home." 268

Harriet Ward was also afraid that her feelings of homesickness were a sin. She compared her family's departure from home with a Biblical story and mentioned the temptation of looking back. Harriet wrote, "This morn we were all up in good season and soon bade adieu to our uncomfortable camping ground with a right good will and never once looked behind us. I think there was little danger of our meeting with the fate of Lot's wife..." 269

Religious beliefs and faith were mentioned by most of the women journalists on the trail. Some mentioned this sense of mission, many expressed their religious beliefs about the Sabbath, a few wrote prayers in their diaries and journals.

A few of the women believed they were exposing themselves to sin

and temptation by travelling to California and Oregon. These women wrote descriptions of the wickedness they witnessed along the trail. Maria Belshaw described a wicked scene at the Missouri River.

May 14. All kinds of wickedness going on. Card playing and fighting and robbing. Several sick in camp. Last night a man was murdered by a man he had hired to drive cattle, his head split open, throat out--the murderer was caught--had a trial--the officers delivered him to the emigrants--they hanged him this afternoon.²⁷⁰

Maria concludes a large percentage of her journal entries with a short prayer or meditation.

Drunkenness, profanity, and profaning the Sabbath were all evils which the women mention in their diaries. Harriet Ward objected to the profanity she heard. She wrote, "Such profanity I never dreamed existed in the world as I have heard since we have been amongst the emigrants."²⁷¹

Drunkenness was another thing several women found offensive on their journey. There was a law against selling alcoholic beverages to Indians or even transporting it across Indian territory. This did not stop some trail entrepreneurs who set up grog shops in wagons parked along the trail.

Two different women described rolling taverns they saw along the trail in 1852 and 1853. Algeline Ashley wrote, "There is a wagon near us selling brandy to emigrants that pass along."²⁷² Algeline wrote that entry as she was travelling two days west of Independence Rock (Wyoming).

Helen Stewart saw a grog shop on wheels in 1853 as she travelled along the Platte River (Nebraska). She wrote, "June 3 Plum Creek There is wagons standing the place of a grog shot they have two sines up."²⁷³

Mary Burrel was offended by the drunks she met at Donner Lake. She wrote, "Encamped at Tragedy Springs, among a drunken gang. Saw the effects

Mary Walker and the other missionary wives were offended and even frightened by the drinking and the drunkenness they witnessed among the fur traders and the Indians at the rendezvous in 1836 and 1838. Mary wrote, "Last night disturbed by drunkards...Some of the Captains and I suppose many of the men are drunk nearly all the time." 275

A few of the women explained many of the things they saw and experienced on the trail in religious terms. Lodisa Frizzell was interested in the volcanic formations and lava flows she saw along the trail, and in her diary described the forces of nature as acts of God and symbols of man's sinfulness. She wrote.

Here the earth has felt a shock at no very distant period...what has caused the earth to be to its center shook? Sin! the very rocks seemed to reverberate, Sin has caused them to be upheaved that they may be eternal monuments of the curse and fall of man; viewing these symbols of divine wrath, I felt humbled; I took a small stone and wrote upon a flat rock beside me, 'Remember me in mercy O Lord.' I shall never forget this wild scene and my thoughts and reflections here.²⁷⁶

MOTIVES

While a few of the women compare their journey to a divine mission or to the journey of the Israelites in the wilderness, most of them do not adequately explain their motives for going west. By the time most of these women sat down to write their first entry or first letter, the decision to go had already been made, they had already sold out, packed up, and said good-bye to friends and relatives.

Sarah Sutton was an exception and in her journal she mentioned one reason that influenced her family to emigrate. She wrote, "We were bound to search for a healthier and milder climate than Illinois to spend the remainder of our days."²⁷⁷

From these women's writings it is not possible to determine in most cases who made the decision to emigrate or to determine what factors influenced the family to go. At least some of the women were the motivators who urged the families to leave. Esther Hanna described a dying man she met in Oregon who said he emigrated because his wife wanted to move to Oregon. Esther wrote, "He was a man of property in Illinois but owing to the persuasion of his wife who wished to come here to her brother, at her solicitation he sold all and came. She died on Umatilla River." 278

A few of the emigrants just headed west without making a firm decision about their destination. Some of the women recount discussions and debate about the destinations of their parties as they travelled in Nebraska and even Wyoming. Mrs. Sawyer and her party even changed their destination at about the half-way point. She wrote, "We have concluded to go to California instead of Oregon, as was our first intention. I am greatly pleased by this change of intentions, as I had much rather go to California." 279

After packing up and leaving home, family, and friends, a few women questioned their decisions. Sarah Herndon reflected about the decision in her journal. She wrote,

As I sit here in the shade of our prairie schooner with this blank book ready to record the events of this our first day on the road, the thought comes to me; Why are we here? Why have we left home, friends, relatives, associates, and loved ones? 280

Once the decision was made and the journey begun, there was almost no turning back. The emigrants were swept along by the wave of emigration in spite of death and disaster on the trail.

One woman was widowed on the trail. Rachel Fisher lost her husband and her daughter to illness on the trail, but Rachel continued to travel west because there was no way to turn around and go home. Rachel wrote in a letter, "I thought of returning but I had no one to take me back, and I could not see how I could do better than to go on." 281

Another young woman writer lost her father on the trail when he accidentally drowned in the Boise River. She described the drowning and the plight in which her family found itself.

But in swimming the cattle we soon found our troubles had but now commenced...swim at all, but at length they were all safely over. Pa, who rode a horse, as he had not done before, and assisted in driving them. By some cause or other he went too far down the river, his horse reared with him, and saying 'I must take care of myself' got off. He endeavored to get hold of the horse, as he let go of the bridle, but being on the lower side the current took him down and the horse swam out of his reach. He _____ to an island, but finding _____ strong turned to the _____. He soon sank in heart. Most of the men were near, but none of them dared to go in, the danger was too great...I will not attempt to describe our distress and sorrow for our great bereavement...With hearts overflowing with sorrow we were under the necessity of pursuing our journey immediately, as there was not grass for our cattle where we were. Mreers. Marsh and Walter being with us, their services were engaged. Mr. Marsh drove our team.²⁸²

Other women were left alone to get their families and rigs to their destinations. Esther Lyman found herself alone on the trail at Fort Boise when her husband felt it was imperative that he go ahead to buy and bring back provisions to his hungry family. Joseph Lyman ran into trouble and did not find his family again until they had reached their destination in Oregon. Esther wrote, "We became so short of provision that Joseph and a young man named Gardner concluded to go ahead and get provisions."²⁸³

Some of the young women on the trail were travelling west with their husbands on wedding trips. They were probably lured west by business opportunities, cheap and fertile land, healthful climates, and gold. Some of these young men had already been to California and Oregon and then had returned home to be married and bring wives and families to live on the western frontier. Most of these newly married women journalists had pleasant and successful trips.

Helen Carpenter was a bride on the trail in 1857. She wrote, "I have been married four months, this will be my bridal trip."²⁸⁴

There were women of all ages on the trail, and age did not seem to be related to a good or a bad trail experience. Harriet Ward was fifty years old when she went to California. She was enthusiastic about the whole trip and wrote that she felt younger and better the longer she travelled. Harriet commented about other women on the trail. She wrote,

I have conversed with many ladies and they all appear happy and in good health. It is strange and almost incomprehensible to see so many of all ages and conditions, from the grey haired man of seventy to the smiling infant of a few weeks...Can it be the love of gold or adventure, or the ever restless spirit of man which prompts to all the toil and fatigue?²⁸⁵

Aug.22. Our company all apparently in good health and spirits. Old Mrs. White, a lady of sixty-five years, says she really feels almost young again.²⁸⁶

All through her journal Harriet records her enthusiasm for the trip.

dear children, were you all with us and our horses fresh it would notwithstanding all its hardships be to me a perfect pleasure trip. There is so much variety and excitement about it, and the scenery through which we are constantly passing is so wild and magnificently grand that it elevates the soul from earth to heaven and causes such an elasticity of mind that I forget I am old.²⁸⁷

had so often read and heard of the difficulties and dangers of the overland route to California, and I find from experience that the pleasure thus far quite over balances it all.²⁸⁸

In her journal Elizabeth Wood weighed the pros and cons of her trip.

experiencing so many hardships you doubtless will think I regret taking this long and tiresome trip, and would rather go back than proceed to the end of my journey. But no, I have a great desire to see Oregon, and besides, there are many things we meet with- the beautiful scenery of plain and mountain, and their inhabitants, the wild animals and the Indians, and natural curiosities in abundance--to compensate us for the hardships and mishaps we encounter.²⁸⁹

Narcissa Whitman, one of the first women to travel the trail to Oregon, expressed both the apprehension she felt at the beginning and the relief she experienced on her arrival in Oregon. Many of the women who followed her experienced both of these feelings. Narcissa wrote,

The way looks pleasant notwithstanding we are so near encountering the difficulties of an unheard of journey for females.²⁹⁰

Do not think I regret coming. No, far from it. I would not go back for a world. I am contented and happy notwithstanding I sometimes get very hungry and weary.²⁹¹

At the end of her trip Narcissa Whitman did not regret her personal decision to travel west over the Oregon Trail, nor did she mind serving as an example for the emigrant women who would follow her across the continent. A majority of the women who travelled the trail between 1836 and 1865 and left written records did not regret their own decisions either. Whether these women's decisions to travel were based on a sense of mission, economic necessity, or a search for adventure, the result of these decisions and subsequent journeys was the settlement of the West and the acquisition of new territory by the United States.

Debate and controversy has surrounded the women on the Oregon/California Trail for the past 150 years. While the debate continued in the halls of Congress and in the newspapers about the wisdom of letting women travel overland across the continent, women were packing up and heading west in the 1840s and 1850s.

Now 148 years later, the overland trail experience for women is still being debated, interpreted, and studied. Scholars have studied men's journals and even women's reminiscences and devised hypothesis and generalizations based on these. Researchers have subjected a select few of the women's journals and women's reminiscences to scientific analysis and used these findings to develop theories about the women on the trail.

A genuine understanding of the women's overland trail experience, a reliable record of the facts, and an interesting narration of the story of women on the trail are all contained in the writings of these 62 women listed and quoted in this paper. These women can communicate across the

past century when libraries and archives unlock their doors and make these valuable historical records conveniently available to the general public. The original journals, diaries, and letters must be printed or reprinted as they were written so the nation can learn about the experiences of women and families on the Oregon/California Trail.

CHAPTER 3 FOOTNOTES

- ¹Tamsen Donner, "Mrs. George Donner to a Friend in Springfield, June 16, 1846," in *Overland in 1846*, ed. Dale Morgan (Georgetown, California: The Talisman Press, 1963) II: 562
- ²Belknap, p. 141.
- ³Eells, p. 58.
- ⁴Ketcham, p. 251.
- ⁵Hines, p. 81.
- ⁶Belknap, p. 141.
- ⁷*Ibid.*, p. 142.
- ⁸Washburn, p. 7.
- ⁹Frink, p. 8.
- ¹⁰McAuley, p. 1.
- ¹¹See page 99 for a more detailed discussion of food and cooking on the trail.
- ¹²Eells, p. 119.
- ¹³Carpenter, p. 93.
- ¹⁴Geer, p. 155.
- ¹⁵Belknap, p. 11.
- ¹⁶Hines, p. 83.
- ¹⁷Agnes Stewart, p. 80.
- ¹⁸Belknap, p. 4.
- ¹⁹Griswold, p. 6.
- ²⁰Cooke, p. 15.
- ²¹Smith, p. 75.
- ²²*Ibid.*

- ²³Ketcham, p. 274.
- ²⁴Carpenter, p. 171.
- ²⁵Herndon, p. 115.
- ²⁶Sutton, p. 18.
- ²⁷McAuley, p. 1.
- ²⁸Hester, p. 237.
- ²⁹Whitman, p. 54.
- ³⁰Lyman, p. 2.
- ³¹Dutro, no page number.
- ³²Sessions, p. 171.
- ³³Griswold, p. 14.
- ³⁴Mary Walker, "Diaries of Myra Eells and Mary Walker, April to September 1838," in First White Women over the Rockies, ed. C. M. Drury (Glendale, California: The Arthur Clark Company, 1963) II: 81.
- ³⁵Griswold, p. 35.
- ³⁶Hanna, p. 3.
- ³⁷Griswold, p. 5.
- ³⁸Pengra, p. 8.
- ³⁹Ibid., p. 15.
- ⁴⁰Ibid., p. 16.
- ⁴¹Ibid., p. 19.
- ⁴²Ibid., p. 24.
- ⁴³Burrel, p. 1, 6, 12, 19, 3.
- ⁴⁴Belknap, p. 144.
- ⁴⁵Walker, p. 77.
- ⁴⁶Ibid., p. 98.
- ⁴⁷Smith, p. 72.
- ⁴⁸Dunlap, June 12 entry.

- ⁴⁹Adams, p. 296.
- ⁵⁰Whitman, p. 78.
- ⁵¹Ibid., p. 51.
- ⁵²Porter, p. 2.
- ⁵³Carpenter, p. 147.
- ⁵⁴Wood, p. 193.
- ⁵⁵Carpenter, p. 114.
- ⁵⁶Bleknep, p. 143.
- ⁵⁷Carpenter, p. 119.
- ⁵⁸McAuley, p. 23.
- ⁵⁹Hadley, p. 11.
- ⁶⁰Lyman, p. 1.
- ⁶¹Sessions, p. 171.
- ⁶²Helen Stewart, p. 10.
- ⁶³Griswold, p. 64.
- ⁶⁴Burrell, p. 7.
- ⁶⁵Norton, p. 36.
- ⁶⁶Sawyer, June 30 entry.
- ⁶⁷Sutton, p. 66.
- ⁶⁸Hadley, p. 26-27.
- ⁶⁹Frizzell, p. 5.
- ⁷⁰Mary E. Parkhurst Warner, May 18 entry.
- ⁷¹Hadley, p. 16.
- ⁷²Herndon, p. 118.
- ⁷³Reed, p. 278.
- ⁷⁴Whitman, p. 51.
- ⁷⁵Frizzell, p. 21.
- ⁷⁶Hadley, p. 32.

- ⁷⁷See page 136 for more about fishing.
- ⁷⁸Pengra, p. 44.
- ⁷⁹Cooke, p. 36.
- ⁸⁰Burrel, p. 54.
- ⁸¹Whitman, p. 77.
- ⁸²Burrel, p. 26..
- ⁸³Hanna, p. 20.
- ⁸⁴Whitman, p. 86.
- ⁸⁵Walker, p. 105.
- ⁸⁶Frizzell, p. 28.
- ⁸⁷Ketcham, p. 371.
- ⁸⁸Smith, p. 99.
- ⁸⁹Hanna, p. 18.
- ⁹⁰Sawyer, July 4 entry.
- ⁹¹Sessions, p. 167.
- ⁹²Velina Williams, "Diary of a Trip across the Plains in 1853," Transactions of the Oregon Pioneer Association 47 (1919), p. 218.
- ⁹³Pengra, p. 32.
- ⁹⁴Pengra, p. 10.
- ⁹⁵Ibid., p. 52.
- ⁹⁶Walker, p. 103.
- ⁹⁷Ibid., p. 107.
- ⁹⁸Mary Walker, "Mary Richardson Walker," in Women of the West, ed. Cathy Luchetti and Carol Olwell (St. George, Utah: Antelope Island Press, 1982), p. 67. This is the only Mary Walker quotation taken from Women of the West. All of the other Mary Walker quotations are taken from First White Women over the Rockies.
- ⁹⁹Knight, p. 216.
- ¹⁰⁰Lyman, p. 3.
- ¹⁰¹Walker, p. 115.

- 102 Sawyer, August 6 entry.
- 103 Hines, p. 99.
- 104 Ward, p. 137.
- 105 Belshaw, p. 40.
- 106 Pengra, p. 20.
- 107 Tourtillot, p. 222.
- 108 Porter, p. 2.
- 109 Ibid., p. 4.
- 110 Walker, p. 107.
- 111 Sessions, p. 167.
- 112 Ward, p. 128.
- 113 Norton, p. 45.
- 114 Cooke, p. 8.
- 115 Mary Gray, "Letter of Mary Gray, April 4," in First White Women over the Rockies, ed. C. M. Drury (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1963) II: 242
- 116 Geer, p. 55.
- 117 Fish, p. 128.
- 118 Ward, p. 61.
- 119 Ibid., p. 104
- 120 Burrel, p. 20.
- 121 Smith, p. 93.
- 122 Geer, p. 177.
- 123 Ward, p. 33.
- 124 Ibid., p. 55.
- 125 Ibid., p. 63.
- 126 Ibid., p. 72.
- 127 Ibid., p. 91.

- ¹²⁸Ibid., p. 135.
- ¹²⁹Herndon, p. 253-4.
- ¹³⁰Spalding, p. 189.
- ¹³¹Ketcham, p. 261.
- ¹³²Carpenter, p. 95.
- ¹³³Hanna, p. 8.
- ¹³⁴Dutro, no page numbers.
- ¹³⁵Frizzell, p. 12.
- ¹³⁶Sawyer, May 13 entry.
- ¹³⁷Cooke, p. 13.
- ¹³⁸Hanna, p. 4.
- ¹³⁹Ward, p. 51.
- ¹⁴⁰Guill, August 3 entry.
- ¹⁴¹Sessions, p. 184.
- ¹⁴²Mary E. Parkhurst Warner, April 13 entry.
- ¹⁴³Sawyer, June 30 entry.
- ¹⁴⁴Pengra, p. 55.
- ¹⁴⁵Tourtillot, p. 222.
- ¹⁴⁶Harriet Clarke, p. 6.
- ¹⁴⁷Cranstone, p. 12.
- ¹⁴⁸Hines, p. 83.
- ¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 90.
- ¹⁵⁰McAuley, p. 7.
- ¹⁵¹Belshaw, p. 13.
- ¹⁵²Eells, p. 58.
- ¹⁵³Ibid., p. 119.
- ¹⁵⁴Ashley, p. 2.

- 155 Washburn, p. 2.
- 156 Eells, p. 115.
- 157 Burrel, p. 17.
- 158 Spalding, p. 195.
- 159 Walker, p. 107.
- 160 Tourtillot, p. 220.
- 161 Cornelia A. Sharp, "Crossing the Plains from Missouri to Oregon in 1852," Transactions of the Oregon Pioneer Association 31 (1903), p. 186.
- 162 Guill, p. 5.
- 163 Frizzell, p. 20.
- 164 Hanna, p. 35.
- 165 Wood, p. 197.
- 166 Reed, no page numbers
- 167 Helen Clark, p. 43.
- 168 Carpenter, p. 187. This was discussed from the point of view of the child in Chapter 2.
- 169 Mary E. Parkhurst Warner, April 24 entry.
- 170 McAuley, p. 12.
- 171 Tourtillot, p. 220.
- 172 World Book Encyclopedia, 1966 ed. S. V. "Bloomer, Amelia, p. 329.
- 173 Eells, p. 119.
- 174 Ketcham, p. 264.
- 175 Ibid., p. 263.
- 176 Cecelia Adams, p. 289.
- 177 Donner, p. 562.
- 178 Carpenter, p. 130.
- 179 Burrel, p. 16.
- 180 Hanna, p. 15.

- 181 Frink, p. 84.
- 182 C. M. Orury, First White Women over the Rockies (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1963), I: 182.
- 183 Helen Clark, p. 8.
- 184 Mary E. Parkhurst Warner, June 20 entry.
- 185 Cooke, p. 66.
- 186 Ibid., p. 24.
- 187 McAuley, p. 1.
- 188 Sawyer, May 23 entry.
- 189 Helen Clark, p. 15.
- 190 Ibid., p. 36.
- 191 Ward, p. 58.
- 192 Mary E. Parkhurst Warner, April 13 entry.
- 193 Carpenter, p. 111.
- 194 Smith, p. 93.
- 195 Cooke, p. 17, 49.
- 196 Pengra, p. 31.
- 197 Hines, p. 82.
- 198 Mary E. Parkhurst Warner, June 11 entry.
- 199 Ketcham, p. 252.
- 200 Bailey, p. 61.
- 201 Walker, p. 81.
- 202 Whitman, p. 87.
- 203 Cooke, p. 22.
- 204 Pengra, p. 40.
- 205 Washburn, p. 27.
- 206 Frink, p. 78.

- 207 Burrel, p. 3.
- 208 Ward, p. 107.
- 209 Cooke, p. 24.
- 210 Hines, p. 114.
- 211 Pengra, p. 26.
- 212 Carpenter, p. 104.
- 213 Cooke, p. 27.
- 214 Carpenter, p. 133.
- 215 In his book Women and Men on the Overland Trail John Mack Faragher states, "On the other hand, in contrast to men, women were not at liberty to relax." The women all described leisure time and recreation activities in which they participated so Mr. Faragher statement is not accurate.
- 216 Mary Eliza Warner, May 23 entry.
- 217 Guill, August 19 entry.
- 218 Harriet Clarke, p. 22.
- 219 Herndon, p. 206.
- 220 Helen Stewart, p. 25.
- 221 Frizzell, p. 14, 15.
- 222 Geer, p. 156.
- 223 Cecelia Adams, p. 223.
- 224 Fish, June 2 entry.
- 225 Burrel, p. 12.
- 226 Hester, p. 239.
- 227 Carpenter, p. 161.
- 228 Guill, July 19 entry.
- 229 Burrel, p. 31.
- 230 Ward, p. 154.
- 231 Cooke, p. 12.
- 232 Ward, p. 163.
- 233 Norton, p. 23.

- ²³⁴Ward, p. 111.
- ²³⁵Pengra, p. 15.
- ²³⁶Ward, p. 136.
- ²³⁷Carpenter, p. 127.
- ²³⁸Helen Stewart, p. 10.
- ²³⁹Pengra, p. 24.
- ²⁴⁰Ward, p. 26.
- ²⁴¹Ibid., p. 63.
- ²⁴²Cecelia Adams, p. 291
- ²⁴³Pengra, p. 25.
- ²⁴⁴Ashley, p. 8.
- ²⁴⁵Burrel, p. 38.
- ²⁴⁶For a more detailed discussion of children's play activities see page 34 of this paper.
- ²⁴⁷Frink, p. 54.
- ²⁴⁸Mary E. Parkhurst Warner, May 22 entry.
- ²⁴⁹Tourtillot, p. 222.
- ²⁵⁰Ward, p. 60.
- ²⁵¹Burrel, p. 11.
- ²⁵²Griswold, p. 50.
- ²⁵³Geer, p. 157.
- ²⁵⁴Helen Stewart, p. 10
- ²⁵⁵Agnes Stewart, p. 86.
- ²⁵⁶McAuley, p. 21.
- ²⁵⁷Frizzell, p. 23.
- ²⁵⁸Mary Eliza Warner, June 10 entry.
- ²⁵⁹Ibid., p. 259.

- ²⁶⁰This sketch is printed on page 81 in this paper.
- ²⁶¹Hadley, p. 21, 22.
- ²⁶²Cooke, p. 26.
- ²⁶³Norton, p. 32.
- ²⁶⁴Helen Stewart, p. 19.
- ²⁶⁵Hester, p. 242.
- ²⁶⁶Hanna, p. 17.
- ²⁶⁷Herndon, p. 109.
- ²⁶⁸Smith, p. 88.
- ²⁶⁹Ward, p. 41.
- ²⁷⁰Belshaw, p. 8.
- ²⁷¹Ward, p. 42.
- ²⁷²Ashley, p. 5.
- ²⁷³Helen Stewart, p. 8.
- ²⁷⁴Surrel, p. 38.
- ²⁷⁵Walker, p. 100.
- ²⁷⁶Frizzell, p. 24.
- ²⁷⁷Sutton, p. 1.
- ²⁷⁸Hanna, p. 37.
- ²⁷⁹Sawyer, June 23 entry.
- ²⁸⁰Herndon, p. 1.
- ²⁸¹Fisher, p. 100.
- ²⁸²Hines, p. 114, 115.
- ²⁸³Lyman, p. 5.
- ²⁸⁴Carpenter, p. 95.
- ²⁸⁵Ward, p. 87.
- ²⁸⁶Ibid., p. 135.

287 Ward, p. 111.

288 Ibid., p. 112.

289 Wood, p. 199.

290 Whitman, p. 47.

291 Whitman, p. 75.

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JOURNALS, DIARIES, AND LETTERS WRITTEN
BY WOMEN ON THE OREGON TRAIL 1836-1865

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

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The journals, diaries, and letters written by 62 women while they travelled west on the Oregon/California Trail are preserved in libraries in the United States. The purpose of this paper is to survey these journals, diaries, and letters written by women on the Trail between 1836 and 1865.

In Chapter One the original women's manuscripts are described. The writing equipment and the physical conditions surrounding the writers are reviewed, and the reasons for writing the diaries and journals are considered.

In Chapter Two the trail as seen by the women is described. From the journals, diaries, and letters a composite picture is drawn of the children, other emigrants, trail landmarks, fur traders, and Mormons on the trail.

The women's personal experience on the trail is the subject of Chapter Three. Trip preparation, food health, wagon trail environment, dress, recreation or leisure, religion, and motives are described.

Speculation about and study of women on the United States frontier and the women on the overland trail is appropriate when it is based on the facts contained in these 62 writings. In the 1830s women travelled with the fur trading caravans, and in their journals they described the mountain men, the Indians, and the fur trading rendezvous. In the 1840s and 1850s the women chronicled the emigration to Oregon and California, and their journals, diaries, and letters help make that chapter in history complete. In the 1850s the women documented the gold rush, and in the 1860s the women described the new settlements and forts which were built along the great trail.

The collected literature written by these 62 women journalists on the trail is an adequate record and a reliable history.